Campione! Volume 6

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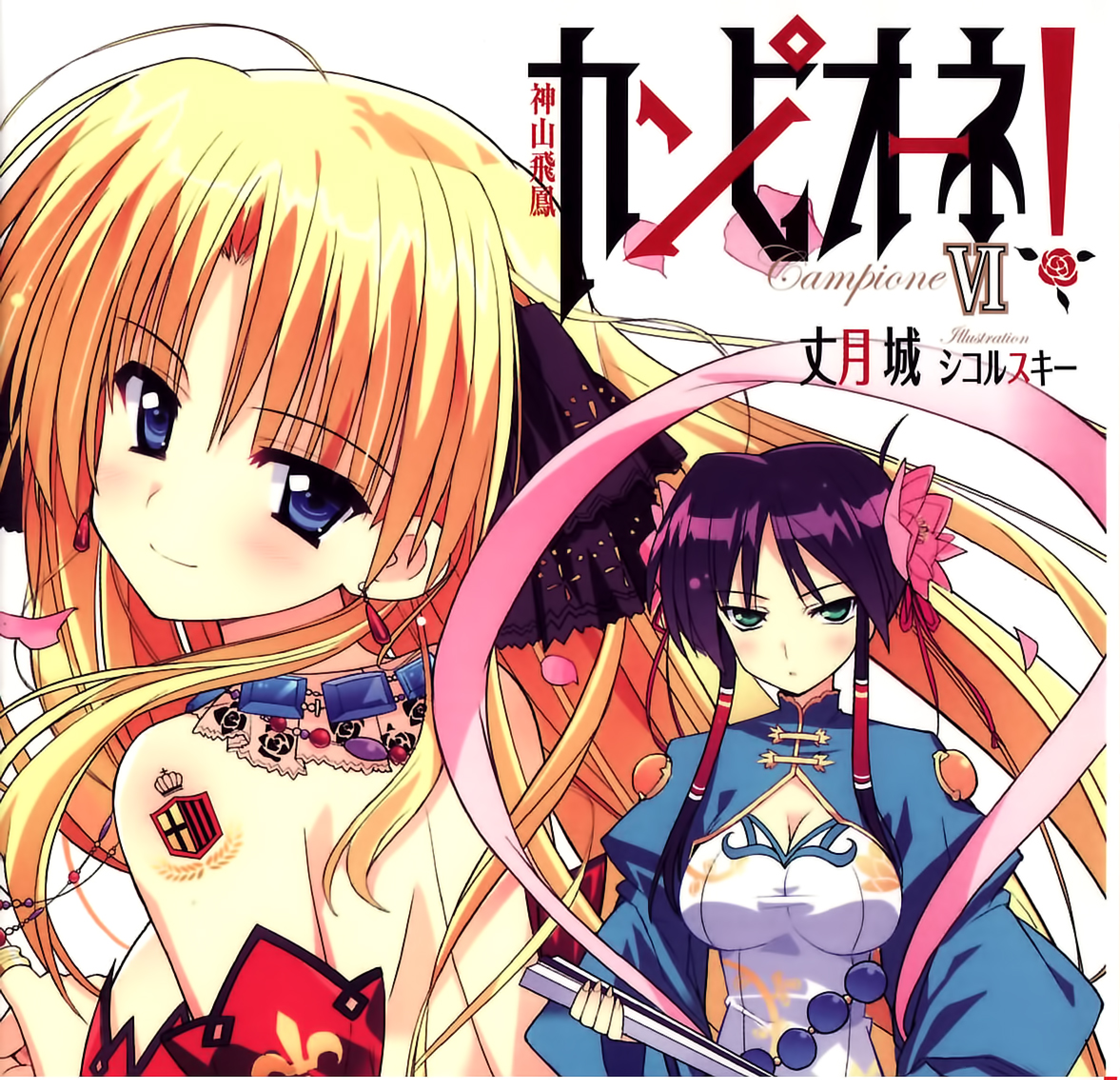


カンピオーネ！

Campione Ⅵ

神山飛鳳

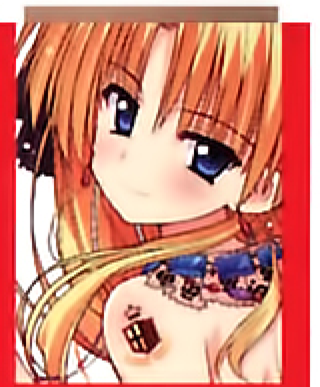
丈月 城

Illustration シコルスキー

た 9-6

カンピオーネ！ Ⅵ 神山飛鳳

丈月 城



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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

媛巫女（ひめみこ）見習い・万理谷（まりや）ひかりは悩んでいた。彼女はそのことをある少年に相談することを決意する。すなわち、姉の祐理（ゆり）が仕える魔王（カンピオーネ）・草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）に…。しかし、呼び出した現場にエリカたちもついてきて？　一方、世界各地では魔王たちがそれぞれの目論見で暗躍していた。それがひとつに収束するとき、かつてない戦いが地上に具現する！

「わ、私、もう迷いません……
だから護堂さん、絶対に私を
放さないで
ください……！」

その姿を現す、新たなる魔王。神殺しは相討つのが宿命か!?

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そだてて！ まりあ！ NEW!
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カンピオーネ！
Campione VI
神山飛鳳

丈月城
Illustration シコルスキー

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Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城（たけづき じょう）

2/14に会った女性から
「ゴメン、今日チョコ忘れちゃった」と言われました。
今年のバレンタインは、これで全てです。

シコルスキー

横浜生まれ横浜育ちのイラストレーター…のはずが
この間横浜駅で迷子になりました。
土地勘無さ過ぎなハマっ子です。

スーパーダッシュ文庫　丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！　神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！　Ⅱ　魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！　Ⅲ　はじまりの物語
カンピオーネ！　Ⅳ　英雄と王
カンピオーネ！　Ⅴ　剣の巫女
カンピオーネ！　Ⅵ　神山飛鳳

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）

高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール

《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

万里谷ひかり（まりや）

祐理の妹。媛巫女見習い。

羅濠（らごう）

《五嶽聖教》教主。

陸鷹化（りくようか）

羅濠の直弟子。

沙耶宮馨（さやのみやかおる）

正史編纂委員会東京分室室長。

甘粕冬馬（あまかすとうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

丈月城

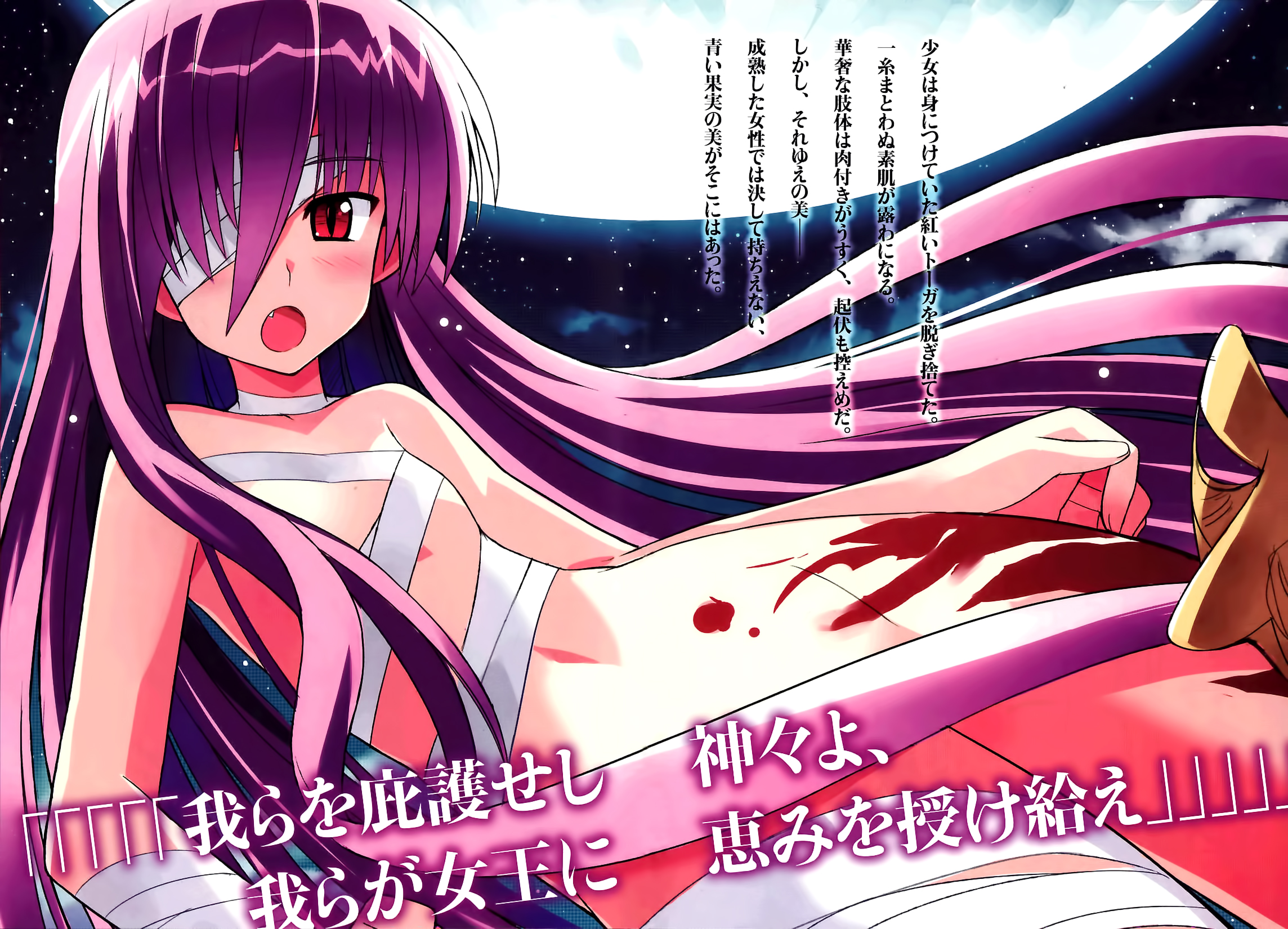
Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

神山飛鳳

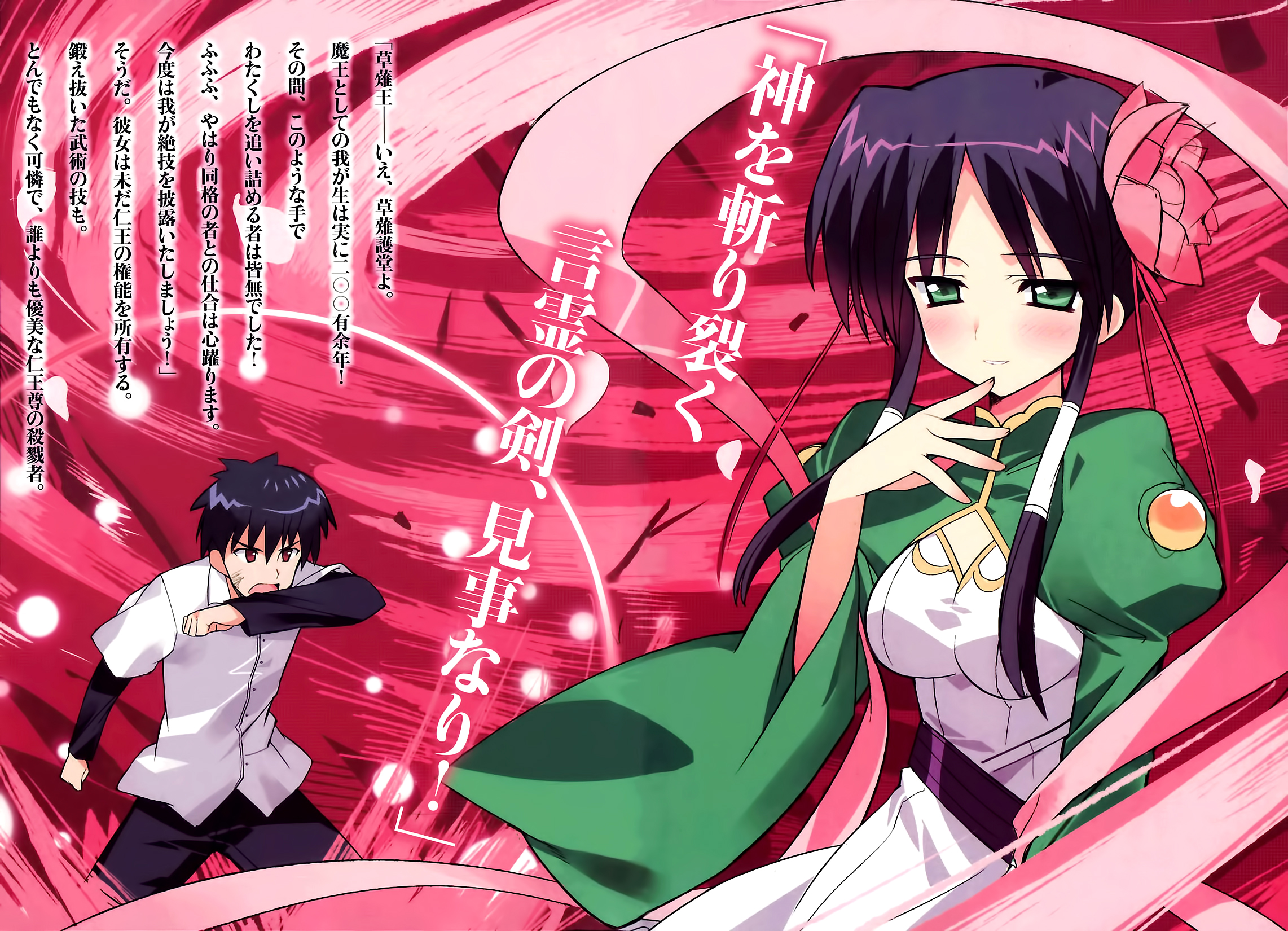
Campione VI

エリカ
陸鷹化
リリアナ
羅濠
ひかり
護堂
祐理
アリス



少女は身につけていた紅いトーガを脱ぎ捨てた。
一糸まとわぬ素肌が露わになる。
華奢な肢体は肉付きがうすく、起伏も控えめだ。
しかし、それゆえの美――
成熟した女性では決して持ちえない、
青い果実の美がそこにはあった。

「「「「「我らを庇護せし　神々よ、
我らが女王に　恵みを授け給え」」」」」



「神を斬り裂く言霊の剣、見事なり！」

「草薙王――いえ、草薙護堂よ。
魔王としての我が生は実に二〇〇有余年！
その間、このような手で
わたくしを追い詰める者は皆無でした！
ふふふ、やはり同格の者との仕合は心躍ります。
今度は我が絶技を披露いたしましょう！」
そうだ。彼女は未だ仁王の権能を所有する。
鍛え抜いた武術の技も。
とんでもなく可憐で、誰よりも優美な仁王尊の殺戮者。

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丈月 城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

神山飛鳳

Campione VI

あとがき

■はじめまして、こんにちは！
挿絵担当のシコルスキーです。
『カンピオーネ！Ⅵ』お買い上げ頂きありがとうございます。
今回のあとがきイラストは
シコルスキーが密かにプッシュしている静花さん＆おまけで猪さん。
6巻最萌えキャラはおそらくこのフサフサアニマルです。
オオォォォォンンンン!!

■前巻に引き続き日本の名所が酷い目に遭うことに。
実際に訪れて色々想い出のある場所が破壊されるとひとしお…
スカッとしますね！(ﾟ∀ﾟ)
ではまた★

Chapter 1 - Goodbye John Pluto Smith

Part 1

It was nine in the morning at Los Angeles.

Over Jack Milburn's head was the deep blue cloudless sky stretching to the far beyond.

Reflected before his eyes was the Californian blue ocean. Venice Beach in summer was so crowded with people who came to frolic in the water that it was impossible to find peace and quiet.

However, the expression on Jack's face was quite depressed.

Jack worked for the Los Angeles branch of Sorcerous[1] Sacrilege Investigation (SSI), the government agency in charge of investigating and concealing all incidents pertaining to magic and supernatural phenomena.

John Pluto Smith's death at this location happened a week ago. In front of the eyes of Jack and hundreds of ordinary citizens, he was killed.

"One who has slain gods -- John Pluto Smith! You were truly strong, and even if all the magi in the world were gathered together, you would still prevail. However... It's too late, much too late!"

At that time, Asherah was laughing madly in a frightening manner.

The witch at the helm of a sorcery association -- the divine ancestor Asherah, bragged arrogantly as the victor.

"Though our organization, [King of Flies], has met defeat many times at your hands, we continued to accumulate the essence of water and earth! Absorbing the malevolence and delusional obsessions of the ignorant masses! Now, I have finally taken form as the heretic Leviathan! Hahahahaha, can you feel the divine power overflowing from my body? My rank is now equivalent to yours, for I have become someone at the same level as a Campione -- the Heretic Serpent! Savor this well!"

In contrast to her vile and ferocious nature, Asherah's body was tiny.

The slender body of the beautiful young girl was lost as it began to transform and expand.

Her arms contracted while her legs combined into one, her torso lengthened, her neck extended, a layer of scales covered her once smooth skin, and her beautiful face turned reptilian.

In just a few tens of seconds, the witch Asherah transformed into a giant serpentine monster.

Sweeping through Venice Beach was a demonic snake over fifty meters long. Probably the height of a twenty-story building if extended straight from head to tail, its scales were a shiny silvery-white in color, with beauty that could only be described as otherworldly grandeur.

Facing such a monster, John Pluto Smith challenged his opponent with initiative.

He is a veteran with a decade of shocking experiences. His opponents included fearsome sorcerers, fairies who possessed the ability to control nature, and massive demonic beasts that could easily destroy a city... He had fought and prevailed over all these formidable foes.

Having gone through so many struggles to the death, how could he lose to a mere big snake --

"Smith! You can't, don't go over there!"

For some reason, Jack felt he had to stop him. Jack had been selected by the SSI for his magical aptitude, and now his instincts warned against a powerful enemy, but Smith replied:

"Can your concerns wait, Jack? To refuse a lady's invitation to dance... That is not my style. Besides, I cannot run away from this situation."

As usual, his voice was full of confidence, and he was wearing a black mask with a black cape.

Held in his gloved hand was a steel-colored magic gun. Running towards his opponent as his long cape fluttered, Jack had witnessed this view of his back many times over the past year or so .

In the past, Jack would always find him returning victorious, bragging casually:

"Wait for the alcohol to deliver to your home in celebration of our little victory... Tonight's starry sky is particularly clear, so let us watch the same night sky from our respective locations and have a good toast!"

John Pluto Smith was a man who acted like a perfect courtier. No matter what kind of crisis he faced, he never forgot to maintain a casual attitude. Even the friend who accompanied him through life and death situations had never seen his true face. Even having a drink with him was not allowed. Smith was a man who embodied secrecy.

...In the end, just as Jack's premonition foretold, that man did not return.

In battles to the death against gods, the masked hero had always emerged victorious.

However, the massive silvery white serpent's choice of action was to self-destruct by explosion --

Seeming to ignite the "essence of water and earth" stored within its body, it planned to take down the hero and the area of Venice Beach along with itself. However, John Pluto Smith grabbed the giant snake tightly and pulled it into the water, using all his might to distance them from the shore. Thus, the two mortal enemies died together in the explosion.

And just like that, the hero was dead.

But the [King of Flies] was not disbanded, and Jack took out his cellphone.

He dialed a certain number recorded in his phone.

The call failed to connect... Was this a joke of fate? In the end, they had missed each other and all he could do was leave her a voice message.

"It's been a while, Allison. It's me, Jack... Actually I wanted to tell you face to face, but there is not enough time for that. I'm sorry , I can only inform you like this --"

Having left his farewell message, Jack hung up. Goodbye, my beloved. Goodbye, John Pluto Smith. Jack bid farewell to everyone precious to him one after another.

Part 2

Los Angeles. A major ethnic melting pot and important economical and industrial center.

The capital of sin swirling with crime, the metropolis where decadence and prosperity coexisted, hidden in this chaotic city were many who dabbled in the ways of the supernatural.

Those who sold their morality and conscience to the devil and obtained supernatural demonic powers in return --

In other words, the sorcerers.

The reason why they used Los Angeles as their base was due to the search for the "Angel's Remains" buried in this land, a holy relic that was thought to grant the possessor absolute magical power.

Although the rumor was never substantiated, it was an indisputable fact that more sorcerers were gathered in this city than any other.

Their natural enemy only emerged during the latter half of the 1990s.

Possessing magic power surpassing any sorcerer's, he also had the ability to transform into non-human forms. The undefeated man who ran through the darkness of the night casting spells, turning himself into an invincible giant, and shooting magic bullets.

At the beginning, he replied with answers like "John Smith" or " John Doe" whenever people asked for his name.

Just like a pseudonym tagged on an unidentified corpse. However, to the citizens who heard his legends and witnessed his silhouette, he was named after the great ruler of the underworld.

And so, John Pluto Smith was born.

All sorcerers feared him; the people revered and worshiped him .

It was three in the afternoon, in the area of Los Feliz.

Consistent with California's dry climate, it was bright and sunny as usual.

But Jack wasn't in the mood to take his beloved SUV out for a spin to enjoy the sunny weather. Leaving his car in the parking lot at Samantha University, he walked to the humanities faculty, his destination was the foreign languages department.

He entered the building of a certain research facility.

--But there was no one present.

None of the usual students or staff were there. Presuming a " barrier" had been erected by the person he was visiting, Jack knocked on the door of his lab.

"Hello, Jack. Unfortunately, the situation does not look positive. "

"In other words, Asherah's revival ceremony will take place tonight?"

Joe West nodded in confirmation.

A world-renowned researcher in the field of fantasy literature, he was an elderly African American, a precious benevolent mage as well as John Pluto Smith's collaborator.

The old man who assisted the hero for the past decade currently had his entire right leg below the knee wrapped in a cast.

"That's right. With tonight's position of the moon and the stars, as well as the flow of the spiritual ley lines... Everything is aligned for the perfect opportunity. The [King of Flies] will not miss this opportunity."

Professor West sighed deeply.

A benevolent mage like him was in the extreme minority in North America.

This was because during the British colonial era, there were overt witch hunts and oppression from European Puritan immigrants, as well as treaties and resistance from local spirit worship... All sorts of dark and unsavory events have been buried in history.

"After that, the members of [King of Flies] have not slowed their activities. That particular point has made me suspicious, to think they made preparations for this. Really, who could have expected such things!"

Over the past week, the [King of Flies] continued their operations.

Clearly an evil cult-like organization sustained by twisted faith and lacking in reason, one would have expected such a group to fall apart after the demise of the strong leader.

However, the sorcerers were pursuing a strategy of conciliation or even brainwashing against the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the upper echelons of the SSI. Due to the death of their natural enemy, they were engaging in daring tactics that would have been unthinkable in the past. The situation had developed into the current state where the front line members of the organization like Jack were the only ones still fighting.

"...But professor, how did Asherah survive that giant explosion? When even Smith who pulled her into the water died, how on earth did she live on after that suicide explosion!?"

This past week, he had been diligently searching for the reason why the [King of Flies] did not fall apart.

Having worked as a police officer in criminal investigations, this sort of thing was familiar to him, and he finally found some clues.

The self-destructed divine ancestor Asherah survived, and her wound-covered body had been retrieved. Though still unconscious , she was alive and guarded by the core members of the [King of Flies]. Recently, they have occupied themselves with preparing the ritual to revive their leader.

"...Heretic Leviathan, she is the immortal snake, one who can resurrect after death. Don't you find that unbelievable? Smith, the one who never lost, why would he go down together with his enemy this time?"

From Professor West's worried tone of voice, Jack recalled the noble bearing he witnessed that night.

"That snake's name is Leviathan, the horrifying sea monster feared in legends all over the world, passed down human stories as the image of the snake bringing disaster... [Gods], there are many examples of snake goddesses with the attribute of immortality. It is probably thanks to this that she survived her attempted mutual destruction with Smith."

"An immortal goddess? Outrageous!"

Hearing his reflexive answer, the professor calmly asked with a tired smile:

"Do you know the reason why Smith is called the God-slayer?"

"I thought it was just to describe his supernatural qualities, an exaggerated metaphor."

"No, it is exactly as the description. He is a warrior who killed gods and usurped powerful authorities... That's right, he is a god killing warrior."

Champion. The chosen warrior. King. Jack recalled these majestic titles.

True, perhaps it was the best description for that masked hero.

"The only one capable of standing up to a god-slayer is a god or another god-slayer. This principle is absolute. That's basically what happened with that divine ancestor Asherah, who transformed from a demon of an evil cult into the snake deity Leviathan."

"But how could a person become a god!"

"True, an ordinary mortal cannot, but she is no mere mortal... She's not called 'divine ancestor' for naught. Sigh, how did it come to this! What a tragedy!"

Professor West's intellectual face showed a pained expression, sighing inexplicably. Even for someone like Jack who had little in-depth knowledge about magic, he still understood how dire the current situation was.

"Anyway, if Asherah revives tonight, it is the end for us. I don't think that witch will let us live."

"Probably. But to be honest, I can't agree with your proposal."

"But we have no choice. In order to stop Asherah from reviving, the only way is to slip into the scene of the ceremony. Luckily after the battle with Smith, the [King of Flies]'s numbers have been thinned!"

For those people like Jack and West who fought against sorcerers all this time, Asherah's revival would take away the last of their hopes.

"Jack, don't be impulsive. Smith is not confirmed dead yet. He is a man like a phoenix. If the enemy hasn't died, then his survival is very likely!"

"It's already been a week, if he's still alive, why didn't he contact us?"

Jack refuted the old man's comforting words with pessimism.

No matter how much he surpassed ordinary humans, he could not have survived that massive explosion.

"You've lost your cool because Smith is not here. Calm down and think things through carefully."

"Yes, that guy's death has clearly affected me, but I am calm. After pondering calmly I have concluded thus, if I want to protect everything, this is the most effective way."

"What are you trying to protect?"

"Yes, to protect this city, people like you, and well as everything I treasure."

"How conceited. What could someone like you protect!"

"I know my limits, but the man who could protect us is no longer here. However... No, precisely because of that, I have to do what I can do, even though my power is meager. I don't want to flee the responsibility that comes with knowing the current crisis situation."

Hearing Jack's plea, Professor West could only shake his head.

"Really... You are hopelessly stubborn, why does Smith only associate with such strange people! If this leg of mine was good, I could go with you!"

"No way, I can't have anyone dragging me down."

The old man's right leg in a cast, still required some time to recover.

"I know, you fool! To be honest... I also understand that someone has to do this."

Jack bumped fists with the old professor's extended right fist.

The two smiled wryly. Not only John Pluto Smith, but this old man was also a rare companion and comrade. This was the moment to recognize this relationship.

"Let me advise you, it's enough to just disrupt the ritual, I'll show you how. Do not force yourself. I have been considering recruiting another warrior of Smith's peers, though it's very irresponsible, we also have the choice of leaving things to that person."

"A person who can match that man? How could another superhuman like that exist in this world --"

"Of course there are, but inviting them for assistance requires some troublesome negotiations."

Jack's protest was instantly refuted.

"Even if he agrees to be recruited to our cause, it doesn't mean he will follow our orders obediently. He might even cause other problems, and the price for defeating our enemies could very well be the destruction of the entire city of Los Angeles -- if Smith will come back, there is no need for us to gamble on such a double-edged option."

"Who could that be... Someone like a fallen angel or a devil king ?"

Hearing this comment, Professor West smiled lightly.

"Your comparison is very apt. Yes, correct, they are truly the devil kings... Good, I am going to hand you the trump card now. Jack, may you be blessed by fortune."

Fortune's blessing, this was assuredly the power most hated by the sorcerers.

The power of fortune accumulated over the ages. The blessing of the fairies and the elves. That power had the ability to neutralize evil magic and curses, purifying them.

The good fortune stockpiled by a first rate mage like West, definitely could bring tangible benefits to the receiver.

"Use it when the ritual reaches its peak, do you have a suitable container?"

The Professor made a glance towards his table, where stationery , books and notes were messily scattered all over.

"A container... is that for placing the blessing?"

"Yes, but the blessing cannot be injected into any object. It has to be something you've frequently used over the years, a rare item made by a famous craftsman, or spell focus infused with magical power... If it's not one of those types, fortune's power cannot be poured into it."

This reminded Jack of something.

"If that's the case, maybe this thing can be used?"

Jack opened the briefcase in his hand, and took out a gun the color of steel--

Seeing this, Professor West swallowed hard.

"This gun... I thought it disappeared along with Smith."

"It was left behind during the battle with Asherah, and I recovered it."

The six-shot large caliber revolver. The color of blunt and heavy steel, its exterior gave a solid and resolute feeling.

This was not an ordinary manufactured gun, but the unique magic gun forged personally for John Pluto Smith.

"If only I was able to use this thing."

"Impossible, this gun was forged by a dark elven metalworker living in the Astral Plane, gathering extremely rare Eorl steel. Since it was forged specifically for Smith, no one else can use it, but it would make a most appropriate container."

Professor West took out the magic gun with great reverence, slowly stroking the body of the gun, chanting an incantation as if making a prayer.

"Pray that good fortune follows you, Jack, what you need most is exactly unparalleled luck!"

Leaving the research lab on his way to the parking lot, Jack met *her*.

"Jack, it has been a while. What's troubling you? Why is your expression so solemn?"

A voice filled with rationality was striking up a conversation. Jack stopped his heavy footsteps. Though he didn't have the leisure for a chat right now, he couldn't ignore the owner of this voice.

"Hello Annie. Come to think of it, we haven't met recently."

"That is because I went away on a trip, and only returned yesterday."

Annie Charlton spoke with her usual stiff expression.

She was Professor West's research assistant, a Caucasian graduate student with vibrant red hair that appeared as if on fire and cut in a short refreshing style. This was one of her most memorable features, as well as her women's suit in black.

"A trip... How enviable, did you have fun?"

"Well enough, there were some good and bad things. In terms of a cost/income ratio, probably break-even exactly, so it was not especially fun."

In response to Jack's casual conversation, Annie's reply was especially stiff.

A cool beauty akin to an ice sculpture, she was rational, calm, reserved, extremely observant, and possessed an air of intellect and upbringing. If only she had some gentle feminine charm, she would be completely perfect. Regrettably, God did not prepare such a gift for her.

She was the woman regarded as beautiful and reliable, but completely removed from the description of "cute."

"I'm sorry, I have to go now, there's a full schedule."

"Is that so? My apologies for taking up your time."

It was going to get busy. Hearing Jack cut the conversation short, Annie lightly shrugged her shoulders and answered without raising an eyebrow, adding:

"Let us have a good chat another time. If you are free, I do hope you can make time for it."

"Got it, let us chat again then."

Jack replied wryly, for her social awkwardness was a little strange.

Though she did not act like the passionate and forthcoming American stereotype, Annie Charlton was definitely not lacking in emotions. She just wasn't good at expressing them.

Bidding goodbye to the research assistant he met by chance, Jack walked over to his beloved car.

By the way, Annie's workplace currently had a "barrier," though Jack wanted to warn her, he discarded the notion -- it would take too long to explain.

As soon as Jack got in his car, he totally forgot about her.

Part 3

In the end, the trump card did not accomplish its intended purpose.

Disheartened, Jack stared at the ritual under way.

As the sun set, night had descended. The full moon was occupying a position high in the sky slightly to the west.

On the decks of the luxurious passenger ship docked at the pier of Long Beach, there were around fifty people of both genders and all ages dressed in exotic costumes, reminding one of the Venice Carnival.

--No, everyone had arrived.

Wearing all sorts of suits, capes, hats or wraps, it was like an anachronistic fashion show.

They also wore masks that only showed the eyes, with all sorts of intricate masks.

This was not a costume party held on a whim by a group of leisurely gentlemen and ladies. They were all sorcerers belonging to [King of Flies], demons gathered here for the revival of the divine ancestor Asherah.

However, virtually all of them were critically injured and covered with blood, on their last dying breaths.

...Going back to the events that happened an hour ago.

Under the cover of this evening banquet that seemed like a joke, the sorcerers had gathered together, laying the sleeping coffin of the divine ancestor in the center, waiting for the ritual to begin when the moon reached the peak of the sky.

Tonight, no one on the ship was an ordinary person. All crew and staff were members of the [King of Flies].

Except one. Jack Milburn had disguised himself, wearing a black cape and a tuxedo with a mask.

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

Forming a circle, everyone was chanting some strange incantation, immersed in the ritual of sorcery.

Jack showed a displeased expression and mouthed responses along with them.

Though he had never received any training, his aptitude in magic allowed him to sense that magical power was increasing. It was almost time. Thanks to his thick cape, concealing the magic gun was not an issue.

The lack of a body search made Jack feel less tense.

Feeling the magic gun under his cape, he muttered the words to himself: "by this good fortune, pray grant me your blessing." Its effects were instant, immediately negating all magic in the area, causing the ritual to halt in failure.

However, the sorcerers then said:

--It failed.

--If this continues, we have failed the divine ancestor. What shall we do?

--If we wait for the next full moon to attempt the regeneration ceremony again, how will the revived divine ancestor punish our failures?

--I think we have no choice. Yes, then the answer is clear.

--Ok, let's do that, if the moon is only slightly off, we can solve this with our bodies.

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

The sorcerers' ritual began once again.

What were they planning? The one who was not a sorcerer, Jack's question was immediately answered.

A cult follower's head exploded suddenly.

Blood, flesh, skin, brains, bones, and bodily fluids were sent flying everywhere, splattering all over the deck and the other members.

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

However, the group chanting did not stop, and another explosion occurred.

A follower's hands, another's abdomen, the neck of the one beside him, the cult members fell down in turn with a series of body part explosions.

Dead without a doubt, there was no need to even check. Jack was completely certain.

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

Yet another died. So that's what they meant by solving with their bodies!

At this time, the coffin opened with a creak. It seemed like it was opened from inside.

"I am the heavens. Thou, tremblest before me! I am the earth. Thou, cursest me!"

From within the coffin, a young brown-haired girl stood up.

Her age definitely no more than ten and a half, she had a beautiful face like an angel.

"Enlil[2] be my head, and the light of the midday be my face!"

The young girl chanted the holy verses loud and clearly.

A voice crisp as the ringing of a bell and full of seduction, somehow it gave Jack a sense of discomfort with goosebumps.

"My protector is the incomparable goddess Uras[3]! My neck wears the necklace of the goddess Ninlil[4]!"

The embodiment of tender immature beauty, her eyes were turning vicious, however.

It could be described as a savage countenance, for that gaze and facial expression looked as if she was about to tear apart everything within her sight.

"My hands are the scythes of the moon shining in the western sky! My fingers are the willow branches formed from the bones of the revered gods."

The young girl took off the red robe she was wearing.

Her naked skin completely laid bare, the thin and small torso did not carry an ounce of fat, and the body was also lacking in exquisite curves. However, this emphasized its beauty -- the sort akin to unripened fruit, an innocent and undeveloped beauty that is lost to mature women.

But what caught Jack's eye most of all were the wounds carved all over the young girl's body.

Upon the white complexion of her back, chest, abdomen, waist, legs and neck.

As if her skin had been stretched by some external force, leaving behind what appeared to be burns, there were red and black wounds distributed all over the body.

Pus was continually seeping out from the bloody wounds, and the sight alone made one feel painful.

Clearly the red stains on the robe the girl took off, must have been the result of this blood.

"Gods granting us protection, pray drive out the demonic curse in this body! O Lugal Edinnu[5], O La-Tarak[6], ye be my chest and knees! O stars of the constellations[7], grant unto me strong and healthy legs!"

The frightful voice of the lovely young girl resounded through the sky.

She was the master of the ritual, she was the ruler, she was the head of the [King of Flies], the divine ancestor Asherah!

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

In coordination with Asherah's sacred words, the people surrounding her chanted quietly.

Praying in unison, the people gathered here, their faith and piety were completely flawless.

But the object of their faith was the witch bringing disaster, and the precepts they offered themselves to were those of an evil cult. Such actions of faith could only be described as anti-establishment.

The believers fell one after another, dying in succession.

"Gods granting us protection, pray bestow your blessing to our queen!"

The group chanting never stopped. With each new explosion, one more person died.

Standing in the center, Asherah's wounds were healed one by one as each believer exploded.

The red and black scars gradually lessened, the pus-oozing skin recovered, and the bleeding stopped. In what seemed like an instant, the majority of the wounds on the witch's body had disappeared, other than on her back. Her pure white complexion was so pristine that it could reflect the silvery moonlight. By this point, only three or four surviving believers remained.

Jack made his decision. Since things have come to this, his only choice was to defeat Asherah personally and then leave.

He pulled out his concealed automatic pistol.

From roughly ten meters away from Asherah, he aimed and fired at the abdomen, followed by the right leg and left leg. All the bullets reached their targets, but no harm was done!

This witch could not be hurt by guns alone!?

"I was thinking what kind of stray wandered into here, but it's you. I remember you as the dog of John Pluto Smith."

One vicious glare from her shattered Jack's mask. The horrifying feeling carried in her cute voice made Jack feel like his internal organs were frozen.

"Servants, offer me your lives! This is an order!"

Asherah commanded her believers as she stared at Jack with eyes of despise as if looking at worthless rubbish.

The remaining believers instantly exploded all at once. Heads, bodies, and limbs were blown to smithereens, spattering the area with blood and the stench of death.

--That's right, the witch's small body no longer had any wounds , and was completely healed.

Asherah had revived in splendor.

She was the ruler of these dismembered corpses scattered all around, as well as the witch of this blood-stained space. This was the embodiment of death and violent abuse. In front of her, Jack Milburn was just an insignificant and powerless flunkie, without a single chance of victory.

Jack threw his gun onto the deck. Even in this kind of hopeless situation, he did not abandon his last and only hope. Reaching under his cape, he pulled out a revolver from the holster on his back.

The steel-colored magic gun, the bow used to fire the black-clad hero's magic bullets. Jack aimed the muzzle at the witch.

"Oh, you still wish to struggle? But what kind of trick can you pull out?"

Asherah's vicious face showed a twisted smile.

She considered the magic gun aimed at her completely harmless .

"I know very well, that ugly lump of steel is the toy used by John Pluto Smith, and not something that could be used by the likes of you, get a clue!"

Seeing the relic of the deceased hero before her, the witch could not help but jeer.

"This chunk of metal does not shoot lead bullets. It is the rare artifact specially created for firing the magic arrows John Pluto Smith usurped from the moon goddess Artemis. It would be different for a [King] of his level... But trash like you won't even be able to pull the trigger!"

Asherah's mockery was perfectly reasonable.

He had already tried many times, but no matter how hard Jack pulled, the hammer did not budge at all. However, this was the only weapon left that could damage the inhuman witch.

Accompanying his prayers, the hammer finally cocked, and the trigger was depressed.

Unlike a normal muzzle flash, what fired out was a bright light similar to blue-white lightning.

The bright flash transformed into a blue dragon of light, piercing the divine ancestor Asherah through the bottom of one of her tiny breasts, exiting her back and ascending into the center of the heavens.

Jack watched in shock at what took place before him.

Success was completely unexpected, for he was just struggling and gambling without hope. Just as Asherah pointed out, this magic gun was not a tool that Jack could use.

"--Ugh! Impossible, how could this...!?"

Vomiting blood, Asherah roared in pain. Yes, how?

Clack clack clack clack. This was a very familiar sound. Clack clack clack clack. The sound of metal tipped boots striking the ground, those distinctive footsteps were approaching.

It was the man with no sense of timing, who always appeared at the climax, the casual footsteps of the latecomer.

Every time Jack heard these footsteps he would wonder. Clearly tardy, but never displaying any embarrassment, a complete lack of frantic haste, the leisurely footsteps of that man.

"Impossible...! How, how could you be here!?"

"What a pointless question. Aren't you people the ones who call me Pluto the king of the underworld?"

With an elegant tenor voice, he refuted Asherah's question.

Concealing his face was a mask made from black armor. Like the safety helmet of a racecar driver's, the visor was like the compound eyes of an insect.

"Could it be that you assumed that I was defeated in the last battle? If that's the case, you underestimate me. As the king of the underworld, I do have to visit home once every now and then, oh? "

Fluttering his black cape like a vampire, he approached slowly.

Beneath the cape, he was dressed like an early modern European aristocrat in courtly attire, in a high class blue-themed outfit.

The elegance of his every move, reminded one of an experienced theatrical actor, but his height was not that impressive , and his figure was rather slender.

"Even if I died and visited the underworld, one day I will return to the earth. This is a law of nature, and if you can't even predict that, divine ancestor Asherah, you are too foolish. The cause of your defeat is your own stupidity."

"Mmmm--! Damn John Pluto Smith! You detestable god-slayer!"

The powerful witch glared menacingly at the masked aristocrat.

It was true, his name was John Pluto Smith after all.

"It's great to see you in such fine spirits, Jack. Have you finally taken an interest in my beloved attire? This is cause for celebration. "

The black mask vibrated from his smile.

John Pluto's sight was now drawn to the black cape and tuxedo worn by Jack. Standing beside him in such attire, it was really like a costume ball.

"Let me make myself clear, I don't share your interest in costume play. Don't compare me to your pathological interest in dressing up. I only did it because I had no other way to slip in here undetected!"

"In that case, then let tonight be the first step in cultivating such an interest!"

He was smiling happily on the deck of this luxurious passenger ship, where dead bodies were strewn everywhere.

Bathed under the light of the full moon, the glamorous hero showed off his handsome appearance to all around.

There was no other lead in the spotlight apart from him. Even the fearful existence of Asherah was nothing in the presence of John Pluto Smith.

"Listen well, Jack, tonight we are the victors, the joint victory of we who share similar tastes, should we not have a great celebration together?"

Jack couldn't help but be perplexed by John Pluto's victory declaration.

"Victory? Smith, don't be careless. The battle is not over yet!"

"It's over... Am I right, Asherah?"

He turned to face the otherworldly witch with his visor.

Despite having her heart pierced by the flash of light from the magic gun, Asherah was still alive.

However, she looked like she did not even have the strength to stand. Kneeling upon the deck, massive amounts of blood were flowing from the giant hole in her chest. Though coughing blood nonstop, she was alive.

The bloodshot eyes of the witch, cursed frightfully at the black mask.

"This gun is a tool existing only to shoot my power. If I am not present, it is a useless piece of metal as you say. However, as long as I am near and activate my authority, other shooters can use it."

So that was the reason, which was why Jack could pull the trigger just now.

Hearing his friend's explanation, Jack finally understood.

"Due to my absence, you were carelessly hit by Artemis' arrow. Even for the Heretic Snake, you cannot reverse the tides of battle at this point. It is our victory."

The immensely powerful magic gun did have its restrictions.

Its ammunition was refilled only once a lunar cycle, and could only be fired six times each month.

On the other hand, it was extremely powerful. A bullet fired from this magic gun, transformed into an ascending blue dragon of light, penetrating buildings, vaporizing thick rock, and could even reshape landscape.

The trajectory could be controlled by the shooter's will to chase after enemies. According to rumors, if the power of all six bullets was concentrated and compressed, much greater firepower could be produced.

As implied by the name of the magic gun, it was like a weapon of demons.

"Jack... Actually I already returned to Los Angeles a few hours ago, and I found out about your plan. Though I could have stopped you, I had to observe silently in anticipation of this development."

"What did you say? Smith, you keep treating others like tools --"

"What a heart-breaking assessment. I truly believe in my friends , that is why I entrusted my hopes to you... That is how you should interpret things."

What outrageous words, Smith's style was like a reckless gambler, everything goes as long as there was a happy ending.

Everything was back to business as usual. Having complained, Jack snorted in protest. If the guy acted any differently, he would not be the masked friend he knew from before!

"Don't get too full of yourself, John Pluto Smith! I am not finished here! Do not underestimate me, the descendant of the immortal snake!"

Asherah roared loudly! Her lovely features were stained red with blood, and she was howling with a face as hideous as a demon.

Her bloodstained body flew into the sky and began to expand and transform, turning into the massive serpent witnessed a week ago.

"Of course I haven't forgotten, but I've already seen through your little trick, it is no longer a threat."

John Pluto Smith fluttered his cape just like last time.

"Leave the ship first. I'd like to have good drink tonight, so let us drink together till dawn, to celebrate the success of driving this witch out of Los Angeles!"

The unsociable and secretive man.

The man who refused normal friendship and never revealed his identity.

Jack was shocked by the proposal that went counter to Smith's usual behavior. And so the showdown, between the masked hero and the witch who turned into a snake, entered its finishing stage.

Part 4

The luxurious passenger ship was entangled by the giant silvery-white snake.

Compared to the three-hundred-meter long, sixty-meter tall ship weighing over fifteen thousand tons, the massive snake no longer seemed that big, but the solemn atmosphere was still present.

This time, the beautiful body of the snake was covered with wounds and stained red by massive amounts of blood.

The night sky was obscured by thunder clouds. As lightning descended upon the surface, the target of the thunder god's hammer was the ship rather than the massive silver-white serpent.

Thunderous roars and crashes, flashes and flames.

Struck by lightning, the luxurious passenger ship turned into an unusual bonfire.

Amidst the flames, stood a giant.

His appearance was rather extraordinary, however. Standing tall at fifteen meters or so, possessing a well-proportioned body, with pitch black skin as dark as night, and horizontal striped facial markings of black and yellow.

Also, the right foot alone appeared to be obsidian instead of flesh.

Reflecting the seductive moonlight, it was made of shining rock.

Covering the giant body was brightly colored fabric in red, orange and black, with avian feathers giving a strange turkey-like appearance. The wooden cylinder hanging on his back carried a couple of spears.

It was a strange appearance bearing great similarity to a shaman of some primitive religion.

[Archmage]. John Pluto Smith's strongest transformation.

The strange-looking giant and the silvery-white serpent fought each other, completely destroying the pier and what remained of the ship. Very clearly, the giant held the advantage. As predicted, the outcome had already been decided from the moment the magic bullet was shot.

Sparks surrounded the entire body of the black mage, giving off powerful lightning strikes.

Striking the silver scales, the burning hot lightning scorched the flesh beneath, causing Asherah's giant serpentine body to squirm and writhe violently.

《Excellent, your demise is imminent, if you're still planning on blowing yourself up, now is the time.

From the mouth of the mage came John Pluto Smith's voice.

《However, Asherah, I suspect you no longer have the strength for that? The suicide explosion last time had consumed all of the essence of dragon pulse that took you multiple years to accumulate. You have lost.

"Damn it, you dare obstruct the second coming of the great earth mother, devil king! You god-slayer!"

The silvery-white serpent spoke in vengeful tones with Asherah's voice, but John Pluto Smith's response was both calm and cold.

《Correct. I am the devil king, as well as the god-slayer... That is why I show you no mercy.

Carrying the will of obliteration, the hero and the devil king declared.

《In order to destroy you, let me tell you about my greatness -- as the omnipotent one, all citizens exist for my use. The people are my slaves, I am the wind of the night, I rule the earth and the sky, I am the most noble mage!

These were spell words.

Spell words of annihilation that destroyed oneself along with the enemy, it was a secret art of transformation that ensured mutual destruction.

The body of the shaman suddenly dispersed into mist. Gathered around the mist were electrical sparks which gave off the sound of thunder.

《I am the axe of the night that calls forth termination! The god of creation and destruction!

The electrified mist transformed into black flames. This was John Pluto Smith's ultimate incarnation, the [Flames of Annihilation].

The black flames surrounded the silver-white serpent, consuming it in one fell swoop.

"Oooaaaaaaaaah! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

《Burn to the very end along with my body, Asherah!

As the black flames of disaster scorched and consumed the exotic snake, the sky over Long Beach was illuminated with a strange color. This scene was testament to the demise of the [King of Flies] and the defeat of the divine ancestor Asherah.

Following the orders of his friend, Jack swiftly left the ship.

Whenever John Pluto Smith started fighting, it was best to keep one's distance.

Various [Sacrifices] were needed in order for him to use magic. If one weren't careful, one could easily end up as tragic as those offerings.

Take the [Archmage] for example, it required a man-made massive structure as [Sacrifice].

Whenever John Pluto Smith took on that form, he had no choice but to destroy a piece of the Los Angeles city that he protected.

There were also other [Sacrifices] that inconvenienced people's lives, even ones that were as bloody as live sacrifices. The people of Los Angeles endured these sacrifices for the sake of supporting the black hero's fight.

Like taxes paid to maintain a [King]'s protection, as subjects of his virtues and abilities, the citizens had to fulfill their duty through taxation.

From the pier, Jack watched the progress of the battle from beginning to end, but he was not the only audience.

At some point in time, almost a hundred people had gathered.

The nearby residents, people who came here by car, they did not look like they were just here for a show. Some were piously watching the fight while others were praying with their hands together, their eyes tightly closed.

Most likely, they came to witness the return of Los Angeles' protector.

Finally reaching a conclusion, the people let out sighs of relief. At this time, a voice was heard.

"Jack, are you okay?"

Jack turned back to find a twenty-something-year-old Caucasian woman. He had seen her somewhere before -- actually, this was a very familiar face.

"Allison? Why are you here?"

"All because you made that kind of phone call! What the heck, it sounded like a message of last words!"

Allison angrily embraced him.

Jack accepted her embrace without thought, hugging his most beloved woman as tightly as he could.

"Another dangerous emergency again, I was so worried! I kept checking the news on the radio and the internet... Once I heard from the radio broadcast, that person -- our king had returned after a week, I rushed here immediately."

There existed in this city a public radio station that broadcasted John Pluto Smith's appearances live. On the internet, others did the same in the same spirit.

Though the masked protector was deemed an unofficial hero, there were people who thought of him as a tyrant disrupting peaceful city life, and even took up self-defense measures.

Usually, they would be the ones providing evacuation information to nearby residents.

However, their efforts this time achieved the result of publicizing the return of the protector, causing people to gather in this place.

Furthermore, they had unwittingly helped two lovers reunite, as Jack and Allison immersed themselves in deep embrace, affirming each other's existences.

At this time, certain particular footsteps were heard once more, that clacking sound of metal-tipped boots striking the ground.

Jack looked up and Allison followed suit.

Out from the depths of the darkness, John Pluto Smith was walking towards him. The people welcomed him with eyes of trust and fearful respect, but no one dared to speak to him.

The people automatically opened a path for him, gazing at this strange man from afar.

He was the hero protecting the people, but that was not all.

The [King] feared and admired by the people, he was the dark monarch lording over this city devoid of angels.

"Looks like you escaped safely. Very good. If you didn't even have that level of ability, you wouldn't be qualified to be my assistant."

"Smith, could you not saddle me with the role of Dr. Watson?[8] I have no intention of quitting my current job... But still, I don't look forward to even stranger errands in the future."

Jack answered the king's greeting with agitation.

Perhaps due to vanquishing his mortal enemy, John Pluto was smiling with joy.

"If you prefer, the role of Dick Grayson[9] is not bad either! As for your current workplace, I will help you make arrangements. It can be resolved straight away -- oh by the way, about that proposal I made on the ship, a little celebration... That..."

In a very rare instant, the usually sharp-tongued John Pluto was suddenly at a loss for words.

Observing the direction of his friend's visor, Jack found him staring at the lady beside him.

"Smith, let me make introductions. She is Allison, someone most precious to me."

Exchanging glances with his former fiancée, they smiled at each other.

"Oh, I've heard the name before, it was your original partner... You did mention it once, but you broke up half a year ago, I did have the impression you said that..."

Jack felt it must be his lucky night, for him to be able to witness such a rare scene.

For some unknown reason, John Pluto Smith was becoming extremely flustered. Seeing his friend lose composure for the first time, Jack couldn't help but laugh wryly.

"Wow it's amazing you remembered that. You're right, but in the end we got back together again... Yes, about that celebration, if possible... Could we let Allison join us--"

"No, no! Please carefully reconsider your suggestion."

John Pluto replied frantically.

"Such behavior is inconsistent with my style after all. Someone like me shouldn't have made such a pointless suggestion in a fit of overexcitement before a battle. Please forget it."

"Oh, I don't really mind... But clearly you are the one who invited me first, so that's truly willful of you."

"Yes, I am a willful and capricious person, so please forgive the rudeness of going back upon my words. My apologies."

Finally back to normal, the masked friend apologized to Jack proudly.

Jack laughed wryly. This guy wouldn't be John Pluto Smith otherwise. He was a man who kept his distance and maintained secrecy even towards his closest friend.

"It is about time for me to depart. Goodbye, Jack!"

As the masked friend finished his words, the lights in the surroundings all went out.

All lighting systems in the Long Beach area lost their function.

Street lights went out and so did the headlights of cars. All the way until dawn, no light could be generated. Even if one took out a flashlight, it was useless.

And then John Pluto Smith transformed.

Using the surrounding light as a [Sacrifice], he turned himself into the [Jaguar]. In the past, this transformation once plunged the entire Hollywood in a state of darkness.

Jack and the crowd could still make out a form in the pitch black darkness.

The hero in the shape of a [Jaguar] -- with a pair of eyes flashing brightly like emeralds in the darkness.

Ooooooohhhh! The fearsome beast's roar tore through the dark night as John Pluto Smith's incarnation disappeared like the rushing wind.

"So, goodbye, John Pluto Smith."

Watching his friend depart, Jack muttered to himself, but it was not a permanent farewell.

When this chaotic city finds itself in a new crisis, the [King] with the black mask will surely return. And then, when his friends truly have need of his powers, he will definitely come back--

Part 5

It was afternoon on the day after John Pluto Smith had defeated divine ancestor Asherah.

Joe West was visiting a house located in a quiet corner of Los Feliz. This house was way too large for two people, just a master and a butler, but no one complained. At least the butler, who knew his master's true identity, did not complain.

"Hi Dennis, how's our queen feeling?"

"Most unfortunately, the worst of the worst, Professor West."

Inquiring the old butler who came to greet at the door, it was an unfavorable answer.

And then he was taken to the living room. West silently thanked God that it was not the bedroom. At least it wouldn't end up requiring him to drink overnight on the bed until dawn... The worst case scenario.

"It's a beautiful day today, my queen. No, Annie. By the way, for you to be drinking alone in depression, that is far too disrespectful to alcohol culture."

"Shut up, am I not allowed to drink now!"

The casual greeting resulted in a standard response of an alcoholic.

Annie Charlton sank herself deeply in the sofa couch.

The round table on the side was full of empty bottles and used glasses. The reason why the empty bottles were not scattered all over the ground, was only due to the diligent efforts of the flawless old butler.

"...May I ask the reason of your displeasure?"

"Oooh, to think Jack already had a woman~~ That bastard, he clearly said he was single!"

Due to being drunk, Annie answered with moist eyes. The usual cool beauty with her stiff facial expression and tone of voice had completely vanished. Alcohol truly changes people sometimes .

"Even if he has a significant other, it doesn't matter, right?"

"No, what about me, I had my eyes on him a year ago already!"

Though their relationship was between a professor and his assistant, they were already old friends.

This was why Joe West knew the true side of Annie Charlton.

Rational, calm and reserved, the 'capable woman' who was both intellectual and took action with initiative. She possessed the airs of a serious and rigid honors student.

But under certain conditions, her entire attitude and behavior became like a completely different person's.

For example, when she drowned her sorrows in alcohol, or when she wore certain clothing, an outsider's perspective would definitely diagnose her as too repressed in her usual life.

Anyway, West decided to comfort her first.

"This sounds exceedingly commonplace, but with so many men in this world, why don't you just find a new love?"

"Let me say, the men that catch my eye, all of them are rare breeds! Take Jack, clearly so handsome and stylish, yet he does not pride himself on his looks. Even though he is a hot-blooded male, he doesn't give off the impression as overly passionate. Though a little rash sometimes, he has good wits, isn't this a rare and excellent breed!"

Annie finally began to sob and cry loudly.

"Even so, I secretly worked hard to shrink the distance between us. Like discreetly helping him in his work, playing appropriate jokes to lighten his seriousness, and deepen his impression of me. I struggled to find reasons to see him at least once a week! Finally, he recently started to confide in me to discuss his private troubles, how did things turn out like this in the end!"

"Annie, may I... You did all that under the identity of John Pluto Smith, right?"

West tried to remind the heartbroken(?) drunk.

Annie Charlton, twenty-seven years old this year.

Defeating the Aztec demonic god Tezcatlipoca in her teens through a convoluted series of events, she became the god-slaying warrior, with the alias John Pluto Smith.

"Despite what you said, Annie is just a mere acquaintance to Jack, right?"

"I have no other choice~~ Dressing up every single night to carry out heroic acts, it's already been ten years -- Occupied all this time, with absolutely no time to get along with guys, I have completely no idea how to approach a man."

West couldn't help but sigh. He had dragged his broken leg all this way specifically to celebrate with her, but there was no mood for that now.

On that night, during the instant when Asherah self-destructed in the sea.

Annie had transformed herself into the [Flames of Annihilation] , and deliberately lost her physical form.

Due to the success of that move, she did not suffer fatal wounds , but the heavy injuries caused her to fall into a coma, floating away along ocean currents. Luckily she was saved by a patrolling speed boat. It took a week for her to recover, after which she hurried back to Los Angeles...

This was a minor interlude in the life of the warrior who possessed extraordinary vitality.

The old friend and butler watched from the side as Annie Charlton drank to escape reality.

Afterwards, she said that the reason why she did not usurp a new authority from the defeat of Asherah, was likely because the snake deity was transformed from a divine ancestor, and not a true [Heretic God]... So it was natural not to receive an authority.

Discovering the error in this conclusion, was something that happened much later.

Chapter 2 - Restless Demonesses

Part 1

The Batanes Islands were located in the northernmost part of the Philippines.

Situated between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, they were actually closer to Taiwan than the main territory of the Philippines. The Batanes were a group of islands where the majority of income was brought by the export of agriculture and fishing.

In this cluster of islands, the northernmost island of Yami was uninhabited.

But currently, there was a child standing on a beach on that island.

She was clearly not Japanese, but a young and beautiful Caucasian girl aged roughly twelve or thirteen.

The elegant curving curls of her blonde hair, adorned the extremely proper and beautiful face.

It was like a classic doll crafted as a supreme doll maker's masterpiece of a lifetime.

If that was an adequate description, the beauty of late childhood suited her quite well in tandem with the seductiveness of the black formal dress she was wearing.

"Welcome, Your Eminence. I, Guinevere, pay my sincere respects."

The beautiful young girl suddenly knelt on the beach, murmuring to herself.

There was no one in the direction she bowed her head towards, only the vast ocean connected to the Pacific.

However, a voice could be heard in response.

"Divine Ancestor, please dispense with the formalities. Let's skip the boring manners and get to the point."

A beautiful voice that reminded one of the yueqin[10] instrument, this voice came from amongst the waves.

Nearby the seawater gathered together gradually, forming the figure of a woman.

"The content of the report you sent to the Mount Lu[11] convent was enough to pique my curiosity. So I command you, if you wish to hand over the dying [Heretic Snake] to me, better be quick, everything starts here."

The growl of the lion and the roar of the tiger. This beautiful voice carried the same majesty as the kings of the beasts.

The seawater had now shaped itself into a transcendent beauty.

With a face as proper as precious jade, a standing posture akin to mimosa, and braided black hair that rivaled silk, she appeared to be seventeen or eighteen in age.

Clad in female Han Chinese clothing[12], this was the figure of the girl standing calmly amongst the waves.

"Understood, Your Eminence -- come, Asherah."

The girl named Guinevere lightly called to the sea.

Beyond the girl referred to as "Your Eminence," the sea responded. Wash... Wash... The waves bobbed up and down. After a few minutes, a third female appeared.

The waves carried her body, lifting her onto the beach of Yami Island.

She turned out to be the witch called Divine Ancestor Asherah at Los Angeles.

Covered with wounds, there were numerous red and black wounds all over the immature body.

In her current state, Asherah could only pant facing the sky while the waves broke over her.

The ferocious appearance of the evil witch was no longer. Completely worn down and drained by the icy coldness of the seawater, her face was like a dead person's.

"...I see, this is definitely the kin of the divine ancestor. Furthermore, the divine power hanging around her body... the seal of the dragon snake has been broken."

"Yes, in order to fight Your Eminence's peer -- John Pluto Smith-sama, there was no other choice."

Guinevere answered respectfully to the beauty looking down at the dying witch.

"Such a name exists amongst the ones who share the name of [King] with me?"

"Yes, the [King] who arose in the New World, Your Eminence Luo Hao."

Family name of Luo, given name of Cuilian, style name[13] of Hao. This was the name of the beauty.

Hearing Guinevere's explanation, Luo Hao only nodded.

It had been two hundred years since she usurped divine authority. During this time, she did not investigate any of her newborn peers, nor did she have any interest in doing so. At most, she might remember their name.

Luo Cuilian was the one and only person in the universe, one who had reached the pinnacle of martial power, having attained the level of seeking defeat but never finding it.

Unconcerned with displaying her splendor to others, such trivial matters completely failed to cross her mind.

"These appear to be burns from the fires of purgatory. From the looks of it, that John whatever shouldn't have committed the stupid mistake of failing to give her a finishing blow. Truly a feat for this girl to survive till now. Did you play a hand in this?"

Carefully examining Asherah's body, Luo Hao questioned Guinevere.

The scorched and burned body of the snake demon. Carved upon the body of the witch were red, black and pus-filled wounds of indiscernible nature. To be able to deduce what transpired during the fight simply from these clues -- such were the extraordinary levels of Luo Hao's observation.

"Precisely, she should have become a carcass a long time ago, returning to the motherly embrace of this vast ocean, and begun a new journey through the cycle of reincarnation... But I shared a little of my life with her."

Guinevere maintained her posture of prostration as she replied.

Never making eye contact with Luo Hao, it was the required etiquette for receiving a supreme queen.

"As long as Asherah is kept alive, then that hero, who is your destined rival, will surely awaken."

"Are you offering your kin to me? Very well, speak your wish."

The solemn and beautiful eyes turned to the young beauty.

"I, Luo Hao, am not one of those fools who forget the meaning of shamelessness. I shall never be parsimonious with the rewards for those who have earned merit or offered things of value. Let me bestow the reward of your choosing."

Never suspecting the treachery of those who made offerings, nor wary of ulterior ambitions or motives, because those were actions beneath a king's stature.

If there was a trap, smash it with the fist. If there was a conspiracy, sever it with the sword. If there was a rebellion, crush it with royal majesty.

These were kingly ways of the one at the pinnacle of martial power. Precisely due to this self-confidence, such an edict was naturally decreed.

"--None, I have no wish to ask anything of you."

Towards Guinevere's response, Luo Hao frowned with displeasure.

But after hearing her following response, the oriental devil king's lips lifted.

"If that hero of [Steel] revives, then the great one will surely seek Your Eminence for a duel. If the great hero wins, the new event I wish for will occur."

Watching the young girl speak, the corners of the transcendent beauty's lips rose slightly, for that was how she smiled.

"If it turns out to be the victory of Your Eminence, that proves the hero is not the one I await. No matter which outcome, neither is disagreeable for me."

"In the struggle between me and that one, you will benefit regardless -- that is what you are implying."

Cult Leader Luo Hao smiled beautifully.

"Fine, you do not seek a direct reward from me, but plan on profiting by using me... Your courage is commendable. I, Luo Cuilian, appreciate this kind of reply."

"Your Eminence is too kind."

Guinevere was prostrating herself respectfully without any sense of servility. Luo Hao gave her a casual glance then spoke in acute tones:

"Divine Ancestor Guinevere. Now, go transport Asherah to Japan and I shall send my subordinates over there. Make sure they complete all preparations before my arrival."

"Your subordinates... In other words, someone from the Holy Cult will be accompanying Asherah?"

The Holy Cult of the Five Mountains that worshiped their leader Luo Hao as their idol, was called the demonic cult by European magi. Roughly thirty percent of all heroes[14] trained in Chinese martial arts and practitioners of Daoist arts[15] were members of this cult, and swore absolute allegiance to the Cult Leader.

"Yes, whether this girl will be usable after all... That is also a huge question."

"Having broken the seal of the dragon snake, you won't last for long. Estimating from now -- probably a month or so... Asherah, are you willing to accept this?"

Asherah got up slowly in order to respond to Luo Hao's questioning.

Slowly raising her upper torso, she showed a happy smile. This evil smile gave off the same feeling as the vicious countenance she bore back in Los Angeles.

"So be it, have this divine ancestor transported to Japan, and use her as the sacrifice. My fated rival must be revived."

It was the California Current[16] that had brought Asherah over from Los Angeles. After leaving it and entering the South China Sea, the Kuroshio Current[17] would carry her to the Bousou Peninsula[18] of Japan.

Once Guinevere accepted the royal edict, Luo Hao's figure immediately dissolved in the seawater.

The actual residence of the beautiful cult leader, was located at Mount Lu in the Chinese province of Jiangxi.

She lived in a little convent deep in the mountains. She never left this place unless there were important matters to attend personally. All the dialogues undertaken with the witch so far, were undertaken through Luo Hao's doppelgängers sent over locally.

Practitioners of Daoist arts were called Daoist priests. A female practitioner was commonly called a Daoist priestess.

Luo Cuilian was the world's premier unmatched martial artist, and at the same time, a Daoist priestess. Amongst the seven Campiones, she was a complete demon that rivaled Marquis Voban of Eastern Europe.

This scene that just unfolded, laid the foundations for the eventual encounter between the great Demonic Cult Leader and Kusanagi Godou.

Part 2

The origins of the Witenagemot[19] could be described as a gathering of meddlesome busybodies.

People deeply involved in magic like magi, occultists, fairy doctors and others.

Or those who were just short of being experts, such as ordinary scholars, marketplace researchers, Catholic priests, Protestant preachers, monks, Shinto priests, artists, capitalists, nobles, royalty , imperial families --

Gathering together for the exchange of information, this organization was created by those with ambition and desire, as well as the wealth to support their will. As wisdom accumulated in this organization, its influence expanded, and it established its headquarters at Greenwich in London.

This was the modern Witenagemot.

The chief organization to promote and support occult studies and the research of magic.

As well as the organization for gathering intelligence on gods and Campiones, so as to respond as quickly as possible to the disasters brought by their descent.

Hampstead was the prestigious high class residential area in London.

In a corner of Hampstead was a mansion with an appearance like an ancient castle. Having wide open gardens, a four-story building, as well as four towers... Such was its grandeur.

Concentrated in this area were many other similarly grand looking mansions, so this particular one didn't stand out very much. However, the master of this house was a single lady. All other residents were her servants... That particular point was rather unusual.

The daughter of Duke Goddodin, Alice Louise of Navarre.

Popularly known as Princess Alice, she was the former spokesperson of the Witenagemot, and now a special consultant.

This was the title of the mansion's owner, who was now happily admiring the scenery in the garden under the sun, a scarf around her shoulders as she sat on the reclining chair.

The twenty-four-year-old daughter of the duke had many outstanding qualities.

If one were to start with her appearance, she possessed brilliant blonde hair the color of platinum, beauty that had been praised since childhood, an outstanding figure and much more, but she was currently using one of her internal talents.

She concentrated her mind, extending sensory tendrils.

Beginning first with her immediate surroundings, then covering the entire house, finally extending outwards --

It was just as her dream foretold last night. Alice spoke to the maid beside her:

"Could you brew me some tea? No, don't bother with mine, just bring it over when the guest arrives, it's just for him."

"U-Understood, Princess."

Princess Alice rarely ate outside. The new maid, who had yet to learn of her habits, could only follow her strange orders with puzzlement as she took out the teaware.

Before she was ready, the guest arrived.

"It's been a while, Alexandre, tea is being prepared for you. Please wait a moment."

The uninvited guest was her confidant she had known for ten years.

Towards the young man strolling casually along the garden path, Alice called to him as if playing a practical joke.

"No, not necessary. I'm not thirsty at all. I don't think you are planning on having tea either, so spare the hassle."

The approaching youth answered coldly.

His elegant features were stuck on a poker face, and lacking in affability. However, he did not seem to be in particularly bad mood, for this was his usual expression. Lacking in friendliness, but instilled with an air of intellect and strong will.

Black hair and pale white complexion. Very tall with a solidly built body. Wearing a grey jacket, the description of noble gentleman was very apt.

To avoid their conversation from being overheard, Alice dismissed her maids.

"No one is around, right? Confirm it with that voyeur ability of yours."

"What a way to describe things, totally lacking in elegance. Please adhere to our convention of calling it psychic sensing, though talking to you about the importance of lingual aesthetics would be like casting pearls before swine."

Eliminating all unnecessary thoughts, and focusing her attention to explore the presence, emotions, and even the thoughts of others. Then interacting with the root of consciousness -- the ectoplasm and the soul, to skillfully and flexibly manipulate it, this was the technique of psychic sensing.

The unique talent of Princess Alice, was known to everyone in the organization.

Only an extremely rare number of miko or witches had this ability, a very exotic variant of spirit power. But against someone with absolute resistance against magic and spirit powers like him, his mind could not be read. Simply sensing his terrifying demonic presence was extremely exhausting.

"Hmph, you are always doing unspeakable things in the dark, for you to be that concerned with superficial matters, what a crafty female fox."

"How dare you, true to your recidivist trespassing tendencies, to use such a crude description on a lady, the title of prince must be weeping."

The first time they met was twelve years ago, when Alice was twelve and he was sixteen.

From that moment on, the two often quarreled in this manner.

Though they were now adults, Alexandre's poker face was exactly the same as before, completely unconcerned with how others viewed him, and never changing his habit of intruding into the homes of young ladies by force.

"Then could you not use this kind of substitute body?"

Suddenly glared at by him, Alice shifted her gaze and pretended not to hear.

"To be called a princess, how could you receive your subjects with a fake? Whether the other party is a friend or a subject, if you don't show your true self to those loyal to you, how could you call yourself a member of royalty or nobility?"

Spark spark. Blue-white sparks jumped out from around Alexandre.

Completely covered with lightning, he entered the world of god speed faster than anyone else, for this was his authority. The magical power of the speeding star named [Black Lightning] by Alice and the Witenagemot.

Alexandre disappeared before the eyes of the one he called a substitute body.

After activating this authority, his location was very difficult to pinpoint, even for Princess Alice who possessed supernatural vision.

Alexandre Gascoigne, the one whose nickname was more infamous than his real name.

The black nobleman who usurped the authority of divine speed from Ramiel[20], the fallen angel ruling over visions and thunder.

His home country was the stronghold of the Witenagemot, which took precautions against all Campiones including himself. A man who enjoyed watching their fear of him, he was the one responsible for the hushed up attack incident of the British Library, as well as various conflicts during the nineteen nineties when the European magi community was in turmoil over a magical grail.

He was the Black Prince Alec.

The eternal rival of the [White Miko-Hime] Princess Alice revered by the Witenagemot.

"Your body is the same as always, riddled all over with illness."

In the bedroom on the fourth floor of the mansion that was strictly off limits to all but a few select servants, Princess Alice was lying on the luxurious bed in her lady-like night gown.

The Black Prince casually strolled through the entrance into this sacred domain.

"Your lack of tact is the one thing that has never changed, would you like to take some lessons in social etiquette from me?"

Alice responded in elegant tones, but she was using a mouth conjured using ectoplasm near her pillow to speak. Her actual body was still lying asleep on the bed in her night gown.

"Could you not enter a lady's chambers so readily every single time?"

"If you don't like it, put up more guards. I don't care."

Alec answered her reproach with disinterest.

In actual fact, Alice had no real intention of preventing his entry . If she had such a wish, she would have set up appropriate measures beforehand. After all, Black Prince Alec was the political enemy of the Witenagemot no matter what.

Opposing him with power was destined to end in failure no matter how events unfolded.

As a Campione, Alec could destroy the Witenagemot by himself if he wanted to.

Which was why he was allowed to associate with whoever he liked without any interference. Opposing the Black Prince required a multilateral approach of political machinations, strategy and negotiations, as well as military force and economic measures. This was the precious wisdom acquired by Alice over the long term struggle against him.

"Fine, today I welcome you, Alexandre."

Alice dispelled the ectoplasm replicating her appearance.

Now only the true Princess Alice remained, lying on the bed. Opening her eyes, she slowly got up, but her weak and frail body was not as easy to control as ectoplasm.

Simply moving the light down blanket felt very arduous, and Alec suddenly drew near her.

Supporting her shoulder, he placed a cushion behind her back.

"Thank you. In my ten years here, I am particularly touched to witness for the first time the soul of a gentleman dwelling in the Black Prince."

"Hmph, this is just basic respect for the rare occasion when you use your real body to speak."

Alec maintained his poker face and immediately left the bedside.

A man who could never go all the way. Though he was not a good man, he could never make himself completely impassionate. Even though he came up with all sorts of schemes, he could never be merciless to the very end. Always seeking victory and more competitive than anyone, nevertheless he never gave up on dependents even if they hindered him.

On the other hand, Princess Alice was a deceiver.

For a human, she was the Miko-Hime who possessed the highest levels of spirit power.

Not only were her psychic sensing and telekinesis exceptional, she also possessed the disposition for spirit vision and prophesy. She could even converse with gods on occasion, but this ability eroded her body, making her extremely frail. A brief trip completely exhausts her, and would throw her bodily condition off balance.

Thus in order to make public appearances, Alice always used doppelgängers created from ectoplasm.

By controlling the doppelgänger, she could interact with the surroundings like a normal healthy person. Usually, ectoplasm cannot make contact with ordinary matter, but by combining it with telekinesis, Alice could maintain the illusion of moving like a real person. But no matter how amazing the deception, she could not pretend to eat or drink.

Very few outsiders knew this secret, probably the only ones were her rival Alec and Paolo Blandelli from the Copper Black Cross who became her ally in the conflict twelve years ago.

--A half-assed villain, and the woman who habitually deceived others with her appearance.

Impossible to describe, perhaps they were a pair very well suited to each other. Alice smiled wryly.

"What's so funny? Still, I already knew a long time ago, you're a very strange one in your personality and the way you think..."

"You're the one with a problem, what weird judgmental eyes... Let's cut the chitchat and get to the topic, Alexandre, what is your purpose in coming here today?"

Since her body could not sustain a dialogue for long, Alice went straight to the point.

"Having left Britanny, the divine ancestor's departure has been confirmed."

Knowing Alice's condition, Alec immediately brought up the heart of the matter. Having fought against each other many times, through strategy, negotiations and even allying on occasion. Compared to subordinates who were not in the know, they understood each other much better.

"Guinevere? What is the reason for her departure?"

"Who knows. But it looks like she recently came into contact with the China's Freakishly Strong Girl. Or perhaps, she had caught the eye of that Advocate of Ultimate Brute Force, and they are planning something together."

"Guinevere has approached Cult Leader Luo Hao..."

First of all, Alice recalled the woman described by the ungentlemanly character.

Possessing the full set of the five Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge and integrity, she was a great figure who carried herself with royal splendor.

However, she believed her valor to be the greatest in the world, and compared to the lives of five billion humans, she placed greater value on the Earth. Simply put, she had delusions on the level of middle school students.

A monster who always brought trouble to her surroundings despite the best of intentions, one like no other.

As for Guinevere, she was the descendant of a snake deity, a witch transcending human knowledge, and a common enemy of both the Witenagemot and the association led by Alec, Royal Arsenal.

"No disaster would be too great for them to bring forth. Those two are definitely the worst combination."

"Yes, one of them is a monster whose reputation alone is enough to bring the world to ruin. For the poisonous snake to deliberately approach her... I can very well imagine the result."

"Yes, Alexandre, why have you informed me of such news?"

Why did you tell me? Though Alice already knew what Alec was thinking, she customarily asked him in joking tones.

The Black Prince laughed 'hoho' and eliminated the need to answer. The two knew exactly what each other was thinking.

A missing divine ancestor and the demonic cult leader who was the most vicious Campione. The one most suited to tracking those two would be you. The one who could freely make use of the informant network of the Witenagemot, and the one possessing the best spirit vision and psychic sensing, Princess Alice.

"This time, our interests should be aligned."

"Yes, even if we were to share information, it should not produce a troublesome outcome."

Appearing simultaneously on their faces was a smile that could not be described as benevolent.

If the Campione conspiring with the divine ancestor witch was to go out of control, it would be an emergency that the Witenagemot could not ignore, and must prevent at all cost.

The Witenagemot which was essentially just a think tank, did not possess the power to stop them.

Should they invite other Campiones for assistance? Amongst the devil kings living in Europe, there were Marquis Voban and the King of Swords, Salvatore Doni. But the two were rather unpredictable and equivalent to ticking time bombs.

Under the current conditions, Alice picked the third option.

As long as their interests were aligned, Black Prince Alec was definitely the most trustworthy devil king.

"Then I have finished what I came to say, pardon my intrusion."

"Forgive me for not seeing you off personally, Black Prince."

Having confirmed each other's intentions, there was no further need for discussion. Alec transformed into sparks and entered the world of god speed once again.

After the Black Prince vanished, Alice sighed deeply, greatly exhausted by the ordeal of speaking with her real body.

Part 3

One of the most popular uses of a cellphone for high school students, was sending text messages to communicate with friends.

But amongst the people close to Godou, none of them made effective use of this function.

Take Erica Blandelli for example, who preferred to chat directly over the phone rather than texting. On the other hand, Liliana Kranjcar loved to write letters. The day she arrived in Japan, she proposed to Godou "from now on I can send you regular reports by letter three... no, six times daily... may I...?" But Godou cautiously refused.

As for Mariya Yuri, she probably didn't even know how to send a text.

When she first began to use a cellphone, Godou had taught her briefly how to use it, but so far, he had never received a single text message under her name. If that's the case, what was going on with this current text message?

Titled 'Can we meet tomorrow?' The sender was 'Mariya Yuri.'

It was already late autumn in the earlier half of October, on a Saturday night.

Resting at home, Godou received the following text message on his cellphone.

'If you are free, could you meet me tomorrow? If possible, let us meet at the school gates at noon tomorrow, please.'

That was the content of the text message. Godou pondered in puzzlement.

Why would Yuri send a text like this to me? Wanting to ask her directly, Godou dialed her number.

No answer... With no other choice, he replied to her by text messaging.

After a few tens of minutes, he received a brief reply saying ' Thanks. See you tomorrow.'

"That fellow Mariya, what could she be thinking?"

Completely without a clue. Come to think of it, meeting a girl on Sunday was basically like a date -- no, no, just as this thought entered his mind, Godou shook his head intensely to dispel the notion.

The next day on Sunday, Godou left his house at eleven in the morning.

It only took fifteen minutes to reach Jounan Academy on foot. The reason why Godou set off early was because he had nothing to do and wanted to take a stroll nearby before heading over to the meeting place.

However, this decision brought unexpected encounters.

"Ah, it's Godou, you're just leaving?"

Just as he stepped into Hongou Street, he was surprised to hear his name being called.

The forceful yet beautifully comforting voice belonged to Erica Blandelli. Turning his gaze towards the direction of the voice, Godou found Erica riding a red-framed bicycle.

"What happened to you...? To have gotten up this early!?"

For Godou, the current time was not early at all, but it was different for Erica.

On weekends, she never got up from bed until noon had passed . That was her habit. But the one standing before Godou right now, was the girl from Milan.

"There's some anti-noise construction going on next to the apartment, and it was too loud to sleep, so I decided to go out."

Godou nodded at Erica's explanation. If one had to disrupt the habits of the [Diavolo Rosso], extreme measures were the only way .

"However, thanks to that, I was able to meet Godou here. Based on this outcome, it's not bad at all, if you are free... No, even if you're not you have to accompany me, for that is the required duty of Erica Blandelli's partner."

Erica suddenly made her declaration.

Today she was wearing a red sweater with black jeans, a very casual outfit. In spite of that, she still gave off the airs of a sporty high class lady, which was on the level of cheating. When Erica wore jeans, it made her legs look very long and slender. This one aspect alone made her stood out from most Japanese women.

"Don't say something difficult like that. Just as you observed, I am in the middle of going out."

He was just going to praise her for the rare achievement of getting up early... But true to form, she brought out her troublemaking skills, so of course Godou could not let her have her way so easily.

Just as he was searching for an excuse to placate her.

"Good morning, Kusanagi Godou, it is too fortunate to find you here... Perfect, if not for the regrettable extra person here. Good morning, Erica."

Another voice was heard.

The first half of the greeting was spoken with the awe-inspiring expression of a female knight, but the latter half had tones like meeting an annoying old friend. The owner of the voice was Liliana Kranjcar.

Her long silver hair tied in a ponytail, it was the girl who resembled a fairy.

"Actually I made too much cake yesterday, and was going to bring some to your house."

Liliana showed the basket to Godou. Today she was wearing a black long-sleeved t-shirt with a blue jacket, as well as a miniskirt and over-knee socks.

As a side note, Erica's choice of red and black, as well as Liliana's combination of blue and black, were the representative colors of the respective magic associations they belonged to.

"To go so far as a cake, you take things too seriously... Lily, I give up on you."

Erica stole a glance at the basket carried by the blue and black female knight.

Compared to the time when she suddenly intruded into the Kusanagi home to cook for him, Liliana was much calmer and in control nowadays, and would never do anything so sudden and awkward.

However, she continued to regularly present Godou with the fruits of her labor and well wishes, just like today.

"Making a pound cake on a weekend afternoon is nothing... Erica, are you thinking of stealing and eating it right now!?"

"It doesn't have to be right now, but today's weather is great, so it would be nice to have a picnic in the park with this."

While Liliana guarded the basket in her hand, the girl known as the devil laughed.

"If you're going to offer me the food, I shall allow you to share it in our company."

"Why do you have to act like you are in a superior position? Have a little pertinence."

"Ah, I'm not saying you are getting in our way, it's because I approve of Lily's cooking skills that I made a concession, oh? Unless you don't want to come with us? A picnic with Godou?"

"Uh... That..."

The red knight's speech left the blue knight at a loss for words.

As Godou watched this frequently repeated scene unfold, he interrupted to refuse them.

"Ah, I'm sorry, I was on my way out."

From the red and blue knights came an intense gaze.

"The cake you brought, I will eat it later... W-What's with you two, why are you staring at me so strangely?"

The red knight looked as if she had found something interesting , while the blue knight seemed deep in thought. Their gazes made Godou frantic.

"Hmph hmph... Trying to put me and Lily aside, Godou, where do you think you're going?"

Erica smiled with a seductive expression. This was the witch's expression that took joy in the misfortunes of others.

"Your reason for going out, must be related to a female friend, right? Am I correct?"

Upon Liliana's fairy-like features, there was a sudden expression of darkness. It was a complicated expression encompassing doubt, worry and unease. Come to think of it, she had been wearing such an expression quite often lately.

"To have the gall to plan a date on a weekend, I am truly surprised. If only you were this capable with respect to me."

"To be meticulously prepared only in these situations... You really are something."

Reproached by the girls, this was merely blind baseless speculation.

That's what it should have been, but unfortunately they guessed correctly this time.

Godou was about to curse his pitiful luck when he suddenly had an idea. Wait a minute, I already agreed with Yuri beforehand, what is there to hide? Just come clean with it openly.

"You two, stop speculating rubbish over there. Yes, you are correct that I am meeting a girl, but that's nothing out of the ordinary. You two should behave, and stop talking like I'm some sort of playboy."

Puffing his chest out and holding his head high, Godou reminded himself honesty was the most important thing.

"I am meeting Yuri later, see, there's nothing strange."

"Yes yes, not strange at all. So let me ask you, the one who asked to meet up, was it you or Yuri?"

Allowing Godou to begin explaining, Erica then posed a question.

Her eyes were laughing, it was the same kind of joyful smile like a predator chasing its prey.

"Hmph, clearly it's Yuri. But that girl will definitely not take initiative on her own like that... There must be someone secretly advising her."

Godou was rendered speechless instantly. To be described that way. Though he wanted to defend his honor, he felt like he would be digging his own grave. So Godou quickly said:

"S-So, I already agreed with her on the time, I have to go now."

"Sounds very interesting, then I will come as well. It should be fine, right? Me, Lily and Yuri are all the same, we are all your close friends."

Erica spoke as if playing a joke on Godou, while Liliana looked as if she had thought of something.

"...Then I will accompany as your knight. This is to verify there is nothing indecent going on between you and Mariya Yuri. Is that fine?"

She took the opportunity to follow as well, Godou felt it was unbelievable and sighed.

When Liliana first came to Japan, she often acted out of control. It has already been a month since, and Godou just realized that she had improved a lot.

Many problematic actions have been reduced substantially. Even from an objective point of view, one would conclude she had become more composed.

On the other hand, she seemed to have become unexpectedly quiet, always calmly and silently thinking about something.

It gave the impression that she was gathering all sorts of information and performing some kind of analysis.

Anyway there was no time to ponder all this, as Erica and Liliana chose to act in unison, so Godou walked with them to Jounan Academy. Somehow he felt like he was being cornered into a dead end, and it felt rather surreal.

Walking roughly fifteen minutes on Hongou Street, they reached the front gates of Private Jounan Academy.

Godou stole a glance and surveyed the surroundings but did not find Yuri. There were still five minutes until the appointed time of noon. For someone strictly disciplined like Yuri, she should have arrived early.

"Onii-sama, greetings for the first time, I have waited so long to meet you."

Someone started a conversation, but Godou did not hear Yuri's familiar voice.

Looking to his side, he found a proper-looking young girl standing there, dressed in a yellow top with a checkered skirt, her black hair cut slightly above shoulder length.

Godou searched his memories, could he have seen this girl before?

And what did she say just now? Onii-sama?

Immediately, he thought to himself -- which parent's illegitimate child could it be? The girl before him was around twelve or so. In his memory, he had never witnessed his mother being pregnant for the past twelve or thirteen years. Even though she was described as having a natural vocation of being a devil, she could not possibly have concealed pregnancy and birth.

Then it must be the father? That middle-aged delinquent!

Ignoring Godou who was stuck in doubt and agitation, the silver-haired knight asked the girl:

"To my knowledge Kusanagi Godou has only one sister, Shizuka. When you called him 'Onii-sama' just now, was it just a greeting for an older male? Or perhaps, you are an illegitimate child of the Kusanagi family?"

"Ah, neither, sorry, I said something misleading."

Liliana's direct interrogation made the young girl bow her head.

Then who was this girl? At that moment, Erica nodded her head .

"Ah, I see, it turns out to be something like that. So that's what I found so similar."

"You already figured it out? Ah, you must be Erica-san, right? The one who defeated Ena-neesama and reputed to be a powerful and intelligent beauty, you really are as they say!"

The unidentified girl was praising the [Diavolo Rosso].

From her gaze she was really praising sincerely. Her facial expressions and actions were very cute, and there was a very pure innocence completely devoid of shameless pandering.

Who did this girl resemble? And she even knew Seishuuin Ena?

"Hikari! What are you planning on doing there!?"

This time came a familiar voice as Mariya Yuri approached.

Not very athletic, she was engaged in the rare act of running.

"Onee-chan, your sixth sense sure works wonders, you immediately discovered my trick."

"Onee-chan... And trick?"

Hearing Godou's doubt, the young girl smiled shyly.

"Yes, I am Mariya Hikari -- Yuri's younger sister. Actually, the one who called Onii-sama out today is me. I'm sorry, I tricked you! "

The young girl bowed sincerely in apology.

This was the first encounter between Kusanagi Godou and the Hime-Miko Mariya Hikari.

Part 4

There existed people who always kept their cellphone by their side, and those who don't.

Mariya Yuri basically belonged to the latter category. She usually kept her cellphone in her bedroom, and never touched it unless it rang, often forgetting to take it with her when going out.

For someone technologically illiterate like Yuri, she would never play around or use her cellphone for no reason.

"Yesterday, while Onee-chan was out of the room, I went and sent that text message."

Mariya Hikari confessed with honesty.

They had now shifted their location to a park near the school, gathered around her bench while she explained. With a lineup comprising Godou, Erica, Liliana and the sisters Yuri and Hikari, it was truly quite a scene.

"Ever since I heard about Onii-sama from Ena-neesama, I've always wanted to meet you. Yesterday I finally made my decision, but I'm sorry I used a deceptive method."

"It's okay, but can you tell me something?"

Godou posed a question to the friendly, outgoing and innocent Mariya Hikari.

"Why do you keep calling me Onii-sama?"

"If you are the [Husband] of Onee-chan and Ena-neesama, then you are 'Onii-sama' to me... Or is it better for me to call you 'Your Majesty'?"

"No, just call me something normal, like 'Kusanagi-san' is fine!"

It was that meaning after all.

Hikari shook her head at Godou's suggestion.

"That's no good, you are the husband of my older sisters, how could I address you so impersonally, that's rude, please let me call you 'Onii-sama.'"

The reasons leading to such an outrageous conclusion, were delivered with a flawlessly pure smile.

Hearing Ena's name and the way of addressing royalty, Kusanagi Godou knew that she was very informed about him.

Sitting next to such a younger sister, Yuri timidly said:

"My apologies, Godou-san... Last night I felt a kind of unstable atmosphere, but never expected Hikari to do something so senseless, it is the fault of my inadequate supervision."

She bowed apologetically many times.

Yuri was wearing a cherry-colored woolen sweater with a long dress, and looked as stylish as a daughter of an aristocratic family.

Due to her outstanding spirit vision, she was able to notice her sister's plans.

"It sounds quite embarrassing, but Hikari has a much greater gift with words than me, and a much bolder personality. Even when I questioned her, she would change the subject. That is why I followed from behind when she left the house, hoping to catch her at the scene of the crime."

"Yes~ But when Onee-chan gets really mad, I have no way of resisting..."

Beside the embarrassed older sister, the younger one protested.

Watching the Mariya sisters, Erica spoke with feeling.

"The corners of the eyes are very alike, which is why I wondered if she was Yuri's sister... But their personalities are quite different, and she reminds me of Seishuuin Ena."

"Ah, I'm great friends with Ena-neesama! We get along very well!"

"Could Hikari be a Hime-Miko too?"

This was Liliana's question, and Hikari nodded her head vigorously.

"Yes, that's correct... Well, I'm just an apprentice currently."

Afterwards, having bought coffee and tea from the park vending machine, they all sat down on the bench to eat Liliana's homemade pound cake.

"I am truly sorry, though she often acts out of line, Hikari is actually a very obedient child. She probably thought nothing major would happen... Which is why she did this..."

Holding the bottle of tea, Yuri became more and more timid as she spoke.

Beside her, Hikari was happily eating the cake filled with fruit. The second daughter of the Mariya family was currently twelve years old, studying sixth grade in elementary school, and was a fearless little lady.

"No problem. Though I was quite shocked, I'm not mad at all. Don't worry about it, Mariya."

Godou spoke as he ate the cake.

"By the way, since she is also a Hime-Miko, does she have any interesting abilities?"

"Actually, that is what I wanted to ask too. To be a Hime-Miko alongside Seishuuin Ena and Mariya Yuri, she must be very talented in some way?"

Hearing Erica's question, Liliana also expressed her interest.

Godou was reminded at this time, all the girls selected as Hime-Miko could make use of special spirit powers.

"Ah, that's right, I can use a bit of my powers, but due to being in the middle of training--"

As Hikari finished her cake and was about to explain, a melody with a quick rhythm was heard.

Most likely a cellphone ring, Hikari opened her bag and took out her phone. After seeing the caller display, she showed a troubled expression.

"Yes, I am Mariya... H-Hello, it's been a while. Eh, today? Umm, true, I don't have anything important..."

She was answering frantically. Making eye contact with Godou at this time, she suddenly said "Sorry, I'll call you back!" and hung up the phone.

"Umm, Onii-sama, may I ask you for a favor?"

"A favor? What is it?"

Godou looked at Hikari, who seemed very hesitant.

"Onii-sama. Since you are Onee-chan and Ena-neesama's beloved husband, that is why I am asking you!"

"Wait a minute, there's something quite wrong with this opening!"

"In truth, something has been bothering me lately. When I discussed with Ena-neesama earlier, she suggested I should ask Onii-sama to help out...!"

Though Godou had requested her to change her way of addressing him, Hikari completely ignored the devil king. She did look very troubled? Yuri also seemed to have realized something, and displayed an expression of disbelief.

"Hikari! Are you really planning on discussing that matter with Godou-san!?"

"Yes, that's right. The young master of the Kuhoudzuka family called me just now, asking 'Could we meet later'..."

Looking like she was in a bit of distress, and it seemed like some kind of shady character had appeared, causing the cheerful girl to feel troubled.

Driven by a sense of heroism, Godou immediately responded.

"As long as it is within my power, I will definitely help you -- but what do you want me to do?"

Afterwards, Hikari spent several minutes explaining the entire matter.

'What! You want me to play that kind of role?' Godou expressed great shock, while Yuri apologized profusely.

"S-Sorry, I am really very sorry. Before returning to her ancestral home, Ena had stayed over at my house and I heard her discussing this with Hikari, but I never would have thought--"

"To make such a request from the invincible Campione... No, perhaps it would be a great chance to further his mighty reputation...?"

"Yes, I also think this is an interesting idea, I like it very much."

Liliana was murmuring to herself all serious, while Erica giggled with laughter.

Thirty minutes later, a black luxury limousine stopped in front of the park.

Getting off from the passenger side beside the driver was a youth roughly twenty-five years of age. Very manly in appearance, he wore a well-fitted suit and gave off a very gentle and stylish impression of an accomplished youth.

"Good, the other party has arrived, is everyone ready?"

Somehow, it ended up with Erica taking command.

When Yuri's sister first appeared, she had been quiet for a while , but now she participated with great interest.

On the other hand, Godou had a depressed feeling. Clearly there was no need for him to act out such a farce. However, it was for the sake of helping Hikari. Surrendering all hope, he sat on the bench despondently.

"Godou, you're no good like this. You need to look a bit more awe-inspiring, cross your legs, raise your head high and stick out your chest."

Due to his hunchback posture, Erica gave acting directions.

There was no other choice but to do as she commanded, and then Yuri had to lean against Godou's right side.

"Yuri's expression is too stiff, yes, if possible, could you act like the gorgeous lover leaning against the mafia boss, and make some seductive expressions like a femme fatale?"

"H-How is that possible! I surely cannot!"

Under Erica's direction again, Yuri frantically shook her head. Even so, she drew nearer to Godou beside her, and created a very intimate atmosphere.

"Lily only has to maintain the usual feeling, after all I can't expect any acting skills from you. However, please show a cool feeling like a bodyguard who is also the lover."

"My being Kusanagi Godou's bodyguard is fact, no acting required!"

Answering Erica in harsh tones, Liliana stood to the right of the bench.

Her arms crossed before her chest, her vicious eyes were definitely like a bodyguard, but let's not mention the lover part.

"Hikari, go over to Godou's side as well. Yes, you have to lean against Godou's chest, acting like you are being spoilt... Also, show a little feeling of indulgence."

"L-Like this? Thanks!"

Hikari honestly did as Erica told, and even thanked her.

Right now, with the beautiful young girl leaning tightly against him, Godou could feel her body warmth, and it made him feel like clutching his head in his arms. Really, why does this have to happen to me?

And finally, Erica stood behind the bench, embracing Godou from behind.

Her slender arms wrapped around Godou's shoulders, he could feel something extremely elastic and sizzling hot pressing down upon his head. Godou swore to himself he will not even try to think what kind of object it was.

"By the way, Godou, hold Yuri's shoulder tightly to express that 'this is my woman' kind of feeling, how's that? And then stroke Hikari's head with the same tender care for a kitten, try it."

"Who is going to do that kind of thing!"

Godou angrily snarled in protest at Erica's outrageous acting directions.

Just as they had readied their roles, the young man wearing a suit approached. The appointment was set up by a simple message of 'Then I shall meet you once, come to this park in one hour.'

He seemed to be called Kuhoudzuka, while Godou couldn't recall the remainder of his name.

Godou knew the families of Sayanomiya and Seishuuin, plus the other two of Kuhoudzuka and Renjou. All together they were known as the Four Families.

In the Japanese wizardry world, they were the four prestigious families dating back to ancient times. This was the young master of the Kuhoudzuka family, who was said to become the family head someday.

"You must be the young master forcing Mariya Hikari to be with you, is that correct?"

Erica questioned the youth as she leaned against Godou. Though they didn't have a vote, the role of negotiation naturally fell to her. Whatever, it was most important to let the right person play the right part suited to their talents.

"W-Who are you people? I only came to talk to Hikari-san..."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman became frantic.

Faced with so many people, it was natural for him to be taken aback. So, since Erica was in charge of the main negotiations, what should he say? Godou began to wonder.

"Particularly you, the one in the middle, yeah you there, no matter how shameless, there should be a limit. To enjoy having so many girls waiting on you like this... As a Japanese man... No, simply as a human being, don't you feel any shame! As a fellow man myself, I grieve for you!"

What a mean thing to say.

...No wait, we should be the ones complaining instead.

The Shinto shrine under his management had been lacking a Hime-Miko for quite a while, so he wanted Hikari to fill in the position. A simple situation like that would have been completely trivial from Godou's perspective.

However, after hearing about the location of the shrine, one couldn't help but object.

Which was why Godou had to take part in this farce. But the other guy's words were extremely reasonable, perhaps he was a good and serious person after all? Just as Godou began to worry...

"Ah, this young master, your eyesight seems to be surprisingly poor, oh?"

Erica deliberately jeered at him.

It was right to let her handle negotiations, Godou tried his best to keep himself calm, and looked down at the guy in a condescending manner. The results were immediate.

"To have conquered the Hime-Miko from the Mariya family, and served by blonde and silver-haired girls... Could you be --"

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman's face instantly turned pale. This guy was really honest.

He probably realized the identity of the [King] surrounded by girls.

...Seeing that kind of response from him, what kind of person does he actually think I am? Though a little angry, Godou endured it.

"You've finally noticed who this VIP is, right? Aren't you a bit slow?"

"M-My apologies, I am from the Kuhoudzuka family, in charge of watching over the Divine Monarch at the Saitenguu[21] in Nikkou[22], and my name is Mikihiko. To have the opportunity to witness the splendor of Kusanagi Godou, it is truly a great honor."

Hearing Erica's mockery, the Kuhoudzuka gentleman immediately switched to a respectful attitude in response.

It sounded like a line from a theatrical performance, Godou felt it was troublesome, but he had no choice but to speak.

"I heard that your shrine wants to recruit this fellow here?"

Godou placed his hand lightly on Hikari's head.

He referred to her in a flippant way and acted as if he was intimate with the apprentice Hime-Miko.

Ever since the Edo period, the Kuhoudzuka family had been guarding the shrine at Nikkou in Tochigi. The position of the Hime-Miko serving the shrine had been vacant for quite a long period of time, because the post supposedly had special requirements.

As a matter of fact, there did exist miko with the right suitability .

Mariya Hikari was the one right here.

"Just as you see, this fellow here is just an elementary school student. To hand her the responsibilities of a miko, and make her leave her home to travel all the way to Nikkou... Don't you think that is too hasty?"

Starting about a month ago, the youth from Kuhoudzuka had been frequently calling to recruit her.

He not only sent text messages, but would personally come to persuade her. Even though Hikari felt troubled and refused, he always came back and resumed persuading after a while.

However, she didn't have the option of cutting off communications with the Kuhoudzuka gentleman from one of the Four Families.

Just as Hikari was feeling very troubled, the top Hime-Miko who happened to be staying at the Mariya household came up with an idea.

'This kind of thing, you can solve it easily by requesting His Majesty! Just ask him to say, "I won't let you touch the little sister of my woman." All it takes is a sentence like that, and Mikihiko would have no choice but to give up on you~'

This was the explanation that Godou heard at the time.

Who is my woman? Though Godou felt like protesting against Seishuuin Ena, he couldn't ignore a friend's little sister in need, and so he agreed to putting up the this farce of a performance --

"Yes. What you said is most correct. However, that only applies to ordinary people. For those deeply involved with the Four Families, not just the Hime-Miko but also the apprentices of martial arts and wizardry, it is quite common to leave their homes early in childhood to undertake training --"

"Even so, I believe that respecting the wishes of the person herself should be the highest priority."

Faced with the very troubled Kuhoudzuka gentleman, Godou tried to refuse as civilly as possible.

"Hikari also said she needed time to consider, why don't you just give her a little more time?"

"...Understood. If the [King] says so, then I have no objections."

The mighty name of the Devil King Campione had its effect, and the Kuhoudzuka gentleman agreed readily.

--Perfect. Godou breathed a sigh of relief. It was fortunate that he was so polite, for Godou was expecting to be despised. Suddenly, Godou had a thought.

Interacting with contacts in this peaceful manner, perhaps he would be able to wipe clean all those unfavorable rumors?

From his initial reaction, the Kuhoudzuka gentleman was surely imprinted with the notion that 'Kusanagi Godou = the great terrifying devil king', this kind of reputation definitely needs to be corrected step by step.

Yes, this should be the right way. Godou agreed with himself silently, but the Kuhoudzuka youth said to him:

"...By the way, you are really amazing."

He was offering his heart-felt admiration. What was so amazing ?

"Keeping so many beautiful concubines by your side, and doing all this so openly. As the saying goes, the lion in his prime is the king of the beasts, while the plum blossom is surely more fragrant than the twinleaf. I profess my utmost admiration. To think I was so ignorant to be unaware that the younger sister of the Mariya family was also under your rule. I, Mikihiko, am utterly embarrassed, and seek your forgiveness."

Who was under whose rule?

Hearing the Kuhoudzuka gentleman's apology that sounded like it came out of some ancient drama, Godou was speechless.

Leaning closely against him due to relief, Hikari was like a sister sticking to an older brother, or a kitten being spoilt by a master.

Hey, don't act in such a way that will cause misunderstandings... Though Godou wanted to say that, he couldn't make a sound. Beside him, Yuri was repeatedly apologizing with the words " sorry, I am really sorry." Liliana was standing on the side going "of course, that truly is my master..." with deep feeling to herself. Come on, "of course" is not a description that should be used in this situation!

As for Erica, she was smiling with a satisfied expression.

Though it wasn't "mission accomplished" exactly, she seemed very happy. Of course, that was the devil's smile that always enjoyed ridiculing Godou.

Chapter 3 - Converging on the Holy Sanctum

Part 1

It was after school on the next day after encountering Mariya Hikari.

Godou was heading towards Nanao Shrine at Shiba Park. After the Kuhoudzuka gentleman had left yesterday, Godou decided to discuss the issue of taking up the Hime-Miko post once again.

"Saitenguu[23] is a shrine on Nikkou mountain in the Tochigi prefecture. The Hime-Miko stationed there requires a certain special disposition, but it is an extremely rare power, so the post has been vacant for almost a century."

Leaving the subway on the way to the shrine, Yuri was explaining to Godou as they walked together.

Erica and Liliana were not present. Godou decided having them present would not be appropriate for handling matters related to the Hime-Miko and the History Compilation Committee, so he did not tell them he was going to Nanao Shrine.

"A century? Then she must be amazing."

"Yes, simply possessing this ability makes Hikari a rare apprentice Hime-Miko of the century. A long time ago, the Kuhoudzuka family discovered my sister and ever since, they have been trying to arrange for her to move to Saitenguu. Nevertheless, we shielded her from knowing any concrete details until recently because of her young age and powers that had yet to mature."

Yuri displayed a rather depressed expression as she discussed the matter.

"Most likely because her current spirit power has approached the level required to take up the responsibilities of the Saitenguu Hime-Miko, Mikihiko-san began coming a month ago..."

"Ah yes, having her talents and ability recognized isn't necessarily a bad thing."

Back in elementary and middle school, Godou had been very serious about playing baseball.

Had he continued, perhaps he could have entered one of the strongest high school teams in Tokyo. However, Godou was presented with the decision at the age of fifteen. For Hikari who was just a twelve-year-old elementary school student, wasn't it a bit too early?

"Just as Mikihiko-san said, it is actually quite common in the Hime-Miko world to leave home to undergo training at my sister's age. Back when I was her age, I had already left home for two years."

"Eh, Mariya also left home before?"

"Yes, to undergo miko training with Ena and Kaoru together."

Yuri named two other Hime-Miko that Godou also knew.

"However, the significance of Hikari going to Saitenguu is different. To the Kuhoudzuka family, she is the rare Hime-Miko of the century. She will have very little opportunity for time off from her post and will probably be forbidden to go home. She could very well spend decades there just like that."

"...This kind of lifetime decision, how could they let a child decide --"

The two of them reached the front steps of Nanao Shrine.

This set of stone steps was the tallest in Tokyo and very steep. Adjusting himself to match the pace of Yuri who was not very athletic, Godou slowly climbed up.

The struggling Hime-Miko, with large beads of sweat appearing on her face, seemed even more beautiful than usual.

"Mariya, are you able to endure? Come, hold on to my hand."

"G-Godou-san, thank you very much."

Because she looked like she was having a tough time, Godou naturally extended his hand, and very naturally Yuri held Godou's hand -- after which the two of them began to realize.

"D-Do not misunderstand, there is no deeper meaning to this!"

"Yes, I-I know that of course!"

Feeling like he should have let go straight away, Godou relaxed his grip as his heart raced.

In his heart he still worried about Yuri who forced herself despite her poor stamina. There was a feeling like he couldn't bear to let go of her hand, probably because of this reason? Godou waited for her to let go.

"H-How troubling. Doing this in such a place... If anyone saw..."

Yuri lowered her head slightly, shyly murmuring to herself.

However, she didn't let go either. Godou had already relaxed his grip, so in order to separate, all she needed to do was withdraw her hand.

"Y-Yes. Since Mariya looked so exhausted, I wanted to assist you a little..."

"Y-Yes... If that is the case, continuing like this is fine. Just as you said, I am very exhausted..."

Godou suddenly felt like his mind had gone blank, and he said something incomprehensible --

Awkward and feeling shy, Yuri somehow wanted to maintain the current situation --

In the end, the two of them went up the stone steps hand in hand.

Godou pulling Yuri, as they climbed the steps.

Successfully reaching the end of the steps, the two finally released their hands.

Godou forced himself to ignore that feeling of reluctance, and stole a glance at Yuri's face. Her head was bowed down, and her cheeks were bright red.

But still she remained standing close to Godou's side, walking beside him, it was a rather unsettling distance.

Godou felt that Yuri was exceptionally adorable, but just at that moment, he heard a cheerful voice.

"I've waited for so long for you, Onii-sama, Onee-chan!"

The short and cute little girl wearing a miko outfit consisting of a white top and red hakama[24], was approaching Godou.

It was Mariya Hikari of course, and Godou forcefully suppressed and calmed his wavering heart.

Having just returned from school, Godou and Yuri were still wearing their uniform.

In order to wait for Yuri to change into her miko outfit at the shrine office, Godou and Hikari sat down in the yard and began to chat.

"Every time I come here I have this question. This place is always so peaceful even though it is in the city center."

Godou surveyed the shrine which was empty except for himself .

It was a weekday afternoon, and furthermore this shrine wasn't a famous tourist destination. Considering these conditions, of course there wouldn't be any worshipers. But wouldn't it be better if there were more people?

"Most people have not heard of the shrine at Nanao, because it is located on important spiritual grounds. In order to prevent disclosure of information about this place, the History Compilation Committee has put in a lot of secret effort in the background."

Yuri replied.

She had likely calmed herself while changing, and was back to her usual Hime-Miko attitude.

"That is why, the only people coming here to worship are nearby residents."

Hikari added, that this shrine was also used for training sometimes.

When other shrine staff occasionally passed by and saw Godou, they nodded politely and immediately went on their way. Godou was very concerned about how those people viewed him.

"...Anyway let's not talk about that, continuing yesterday's discussion."

Godou decided to put other concerns aside and went straight to the main point.

"Nikkou's shrine's compelling reason for having you as a miko, what is it exactly?"

"That is because I can use [Disaster Purification]. The Saitenguu Hime-Miko must be someone who is skilled at using this power... By the way, let me demonstrate. Onee-chan, please use some spell of your choosing."

Hearing Hikari's request, Yuri took out from her outfit a white square piece of Japanese paper[25].

Folding with her slender fingers, she immediately reproduced the form of a familiar animal -- the crane. Using origami, Yuri had folded the piece of paper into a white crane.

The paper crane sitting on the palm of the Hime-Miko, began to float lightly up into the sky.

"It floated!?"

Godou watched in amazement, as Yuri grabbed the paper crane and tore it into two.

Releasing the torn pieces of paper, Godou expected them to fall to the ground, but the two pieces began to fly and turned into cranes like the one before.

Yuri repeatedly increased the number of paper cranes in this way, stopping when there were twelve.

"This is nothing really, just a very simple spell..."

Yuri smiled shyly. The paper cranes drifted slowly in the air, but in the instant when Hikari grabbed one of them, all twelve cranes vanished.

Left in Hikari's hand was a single white sheet of Japanese paper.

Though complicated fold creases remained, it had lost its crane shape and returned to the original square.

"Onii-chan, this is disaster purification! However, it's not a very flashy ability."

"Simply stated, it can dispel spells and magical power. Hikari can erase all those nonexistent supernatural powers."

"Because I am still in training, it only works through direct contact."

Hearing the sisters' explanation, Godou nodded to express understanding.

Describing the ability as not very flashy, true, it was quite unassuming. However, it should be an extremely convenient power instead.

"Could it erase the power of gods and us Campiones? If that's possible, then it should be able to reduce the damage when a crisis occurs!"

Godou suddenly thought of this, and directly brought it up. Such a meaningful ability, should best be used against those who threatened world peace. (But quite regrettably, Godou could not exclude himself from that group.)

"Umm, as for that... It's actually not possible~~"

"A Campione or a [Heretic God]'s authority, consists of extremely powerful magic. No matter how much we try, it can only erase a small portion, or weaken it for a very short period of time."

Godou's wishful thinking was immediately refuted by the sisters.

"If that's the case... What a shame. So why do they need a miko with this kind of power?"

"They did not explain to us either, why the Saitenguu Hime-Miko requires the power of disaster purification."

Yuri was a little troubled, and Godou frowned.

"Not even telling the candidate and her family the reason for being selected, that's going a bit too far."

"It cannot be helped. Saitenguu is a part of Nikkou Toushouguu [26], and an important spiritual site where the divine monarch is guarded. Information about this place is top secret amongst the secrets of the Kuhoudzuka family. Even though we are Hime-Miko , the stature of the Mariya family is not enough, and they have no obligation to explain anything to us."

Speaking of the divine monarch, that should be Tokugawa Ieyasu[27], right? Godou recalled what he knew about Nikkou Toushouguu.

After the death of Tokugawa Ieyasu, a shrine was built as a mausoleum where his remains were kept and venerated. The deity worshiped there was, of course, the deified Divine Monarch Lord Ieyasu. As a god, his name was Toushou Daigongen.

"I really cannot be at ease letting you go over alone to those suspicious characters... To be honest, I feel that they are completely untrustworthy."

"But Onii-sama, Mikihiko-san is not a bad person."

Hikari answered Godou with a troubled expression.

"According to Ena-neesama, amongst the heirs of the Four Families, he is the most earnest and serious!"

Seishuuin Ena actually had the self-awareness to know she took things too lightly eh? This revelation made Godou deeply impressed.

"If he was such a serious person, why does he have to undertake such a problematic recruitment?"

"Saitenguu was built three hundred years ago, and the Kuhoudzuka family has been guarding it all along. For that kind of prestigious family with roots in ancient wizardry, there must be many unreasonable rules passed down. Most likely Mikihiko-san is bound by something like that, and lost his freedom."

Yuri explained.

"Just like those troublesome family rules in those ancient clans that frequently occur in history books?"

"S-Should be. Ah--?"

Responding to Godou's rough analogy, Yuri suddenly began to look around.

"Mariya, what's with you?"

"Ah, nothing, it just feels like someone has been staring at us all along."

Though Yuri dismissed it as her imagination, Godou disagreed. If the Hime-Miko who possessed outstanding spirit vision said she "felt something" then there was very little chance of it being nothing.

"Onee-chan, let's use the birds just now to investigate?"

"Right... Just to be safe, let us do that."

At her younger sister's suggestion, Yuri used the same method from before to make ten-odd paper cranes. The paper cranes flew within the boundaries of the shrine area, all in different directions.

With the sound of paper shredding, one of the paper cranes was suddenly torn apart. At the same time there was a yell.

"Wah!?"

The sound came from a corner of a nearby pine tree, where the paper crane broke.

After pondering for a moment, Godou turned to Hikari.

"Umm... That move you did just now, could you try it on the tree over there."

"Ah, yes, I got it, Onii-sama."

Hikari walked over to the tree Godou indicated and touched it.

Suddenly, a person's outline appeared on the bark of the pine tree, and soon the outline turned into the beautiful form of a girl of Eastern European descent with a silver ponytail.

"Liliana... What are you doing in such a place?"

Hearing Godou's voice, Liliana Kranjcar nervously explained:

"J-Just acting as a bodyguard, I was worried about you."

The expected answer.

This female knight always called herself Kusanagi Godou's bodyguard and followed him.

"Didn't I tell you before, not to do anything so overboard?"

"Not overboard at all, this is a necessary precaution for protecting the lord, it is a knight's duty."

In order to hide her embarrassment, Liliana answered seriously.

Part 2

Liliana Kranjcar was very talented at illusionary spells. When used, she could make her body one with the bark of a tree, it was a spell that worked like camouflage.

"This is called disaster purification, right? To be able to disrupt my [Concealment], that is quite capable of you. A similar kind of spell can be obtained through the blessing of good fortune borrowed from the fairies, but it requires accumulation over long periods of time. Overall, yours is the most excellent form of anti-magic techniques."

After her spell was neutralized, Liliana explained.

"Fu, that's quite amazing. Anyway, Liliana."

"Y-Yes."

"No matter what, secretly following me is going too far. Give me a break."

Godou had already become accustomed to dealing with this silver-haired female knight.

She was not a dense person, rather, one should describe her as oversensitive, causing her to appear meddlesome sometimes. In situations like this it was best to communicate properly with her, letting her know she doesn't need to go so far in taking care of him.

However, Liliana replied with a worried expression:

"But today you are seeing another woman behind my back!"

"Not a woman, a girl! Besides, isn't her sister Mariya coming along with me!"

"Kusanagi Godou, your explanation has a little bit of merit. But I understand very well, Japanese people have always held an interest in young girls even back in the Heian period. Like that Hikaru Genji[28], also deceived a very young girl to become his wife."

Lucretia Zola was the same. Do they both want to make trouble for Murasaki Shikibu[29] so much?

Seeing the doubt on Godou's face, Liliana continued:

"The probability of the younger Mariya sister becoming your underaged bride is definitely quite high. Statistically, males will automatically fall for young females who approach and offer themselves willingly."

"Onee-chan, is this true!? Does Onii-sama plan on having me as a concubine!?"

"N-No such thing, and you are not allowed to use a term like concubine!"

Seeing the honest Hikari surprised, and Yuri scolding her, Godou made his decision.

He cannot allow this misunderstanding to persist. He must take this opportunity to make things clear.

"Don't use a term like underaged bride. Now is a good opportunity, I will make myself clear."

"Yes, I understand."

"Liliana, don't misunderstand, I am not the playboy in your imagination, and I have never been popular with girls. If you really need a description, I am the very serious type who has never gotten used to dealing with females."

Telling her his sincere opinion, Liliana listened and nodded deeply.

"Kusanagi Godou, I understand very well, I already know what kind of person you are."

"Though you say that... You always act like a loose cannon."

"I do everything I do because I understand you. In contrast to your massive web of female relationships, you prefer a modest and simple life, right? Though your actions are those of an advocate for a life of pleasure under polygamy, on an intellectual level you insist on monogamy..."

"Yes, yes... But take out the redundant parts about the massive web of female relationships and a life of pleasure."

"Is that so? About that point, I have actually done some investigations."

What did Liliana investigate? Godou pondered in puzzlement.

"Recently, I have found it rather unbelievable. Having followed you closely during this time, I have come to understand your personality and preferences. However, I have found it completely impossible to reconcile the fact that you are somehow managing a harem containing Erica and Mariya Yuri. How on earth was it possible... In order to solve this mystery, I have investigated all your female relationships over the past few years."

For her to have done such a thing. But even if one were to investigate the female relationships of Kusanagi Godou, whose age equals the number of years without a girlfriend, nothing meaningful should be found.

As Godou felt that things were becoming increasingly unbelievable, the silver-haired knight asked him:

"Do you remember in the third year of middle school, your very intimate classmate Kyouno Emili?"

"Kyouno... There was someone called that, a girl with a poor memory, always forgetting to bring textbooks, so she frequently combined desks with me and shared mine. She was always inexplicably friendly to me, and started conversations for no particular reason, probably because we were in the same class."

"Then what about Kyouno Emili's close friend, Uchida Kyouko?"

"You mean that very quiet and proper fellow, always sticking together with Kyouno. Extremely quiet. Now that you mention it, she did write me a 'can we be friends?' letter, so I became friends with her."

"One more person I must confirm, who is Tokunaga Asuka?"

"She's an old friend who lives on the same commercial street as me, didn't you pass her by many times already, Liliana? Her personality is very strong, and often complaining, but sometimes she would act so friendly it makes me feel uncomfortable, like suddenly forcing a lunchbox onto me, saying 'I made too much by accident, so here you go!' Things like that."

And then Liliana continued to list out a series of names.

Endou Maya, Narasaki Sayaka, Nakazawa Kaori and many others. Listing out all these people whom Godou only retained vague memories, it took a lot of work to recall them all.

"So, you even made marriage promises in your childhood... And that is the situation, Kusanagi Godou."

"Eh? We were all friends in the past. What do you mean by 'and that is the situation'?"

As Godou tried to object, he noticed that the Mariya sisters were staring at him strangely.

"I-I never thought, Godou-san would have relationships with so many people..."

"Amazing, Onii-sama! Popular with the ladies just as the rumors say, what a true man!"

Yuri was surprised by revelations of 'eh, this person actually had such a past!?' and showed troubled eyes. On the other hand, Hikari was looking at Godou with eyes of pure admiration.

"To have so many girls distressed over you, and yet you remain completely unaware... You were born with a lady-killer's disposition. I, Liliana Kranjcar am impressed from the bottom of my heart. Kusanagi Godou, you are like a sleepwalking serial murderer, a rare and unaware lady-killer!"

Liliana declared her conclusion in very stern tones. How was that possible, I, Kusanagi Godou, am not that popular a man.

But Yuri over there was nodding repeatedly, and Hikari was going "wow, this is an adult's story" while looking over with eyes of worship. They both agreed. What on earth was this!?

"So I rudely followed you today, in order to prevent the young innocent girl from being captured by your poisonous fangs -- no, sorry, it should be your charm instead."

"Wait a minute, Liliana, I never had any immoral thoughts about Hikari ever!"

"Correct, you are right. Your sense of righteousness is strong, and very noble, unlike those despicable people harboring sexual desires towards underaged girls, and you would never see this kind of underaged girl as a candidate for romantic pursuit. However, look at this girl here."

"?" Liliana pointed her finger at the younger Mariya sister, puzzling Hikari.

"Mariya Hikari is already completely taken by admiration for you. Do you not see the dangerous situation?"

"Ah? She's just acting friendly towards her elders, right?"

"Normally, that explanation might be correct. But you have no self-awareness as a lady-killer... So that is why I have speculated on future developments."

Godou recalled Liliana's interests. The fairy-like and beautiful young lady of Eastern European descent, was an aspiring author of daring romantic novels. This gave Godou a very ominous feeling.

"Right... First comes the fateful beginning with this childhood admiration, Mariya Hikari begins to have a minor crush on you, and then she will offer her untainted innocence to you. As the inexperienced and fearless love begins to sublimate to the next level, she will wish for her heart and body to become your possessions. In the beginning you will rebuff her using the age difference as an excuse, but soon enough immoral thoughts will surface, and you decide to pluck this lovely little flower, and seize ownership--!"

"Is that so... One day I will be serving by Onii-sama's side too..."

"N-No way! Your older sister will not allow such a thing!"

Liliana's problematic speech sent the Mariya sisters into turmoil , as Godou kept his distance away from them, he began to whisper to the blue knight one on one.

"Hey, Liliana, you overthought things way too much... Rather, I should say your delusional imagination is too vivid. Hikari is even younger than my sister Shizuka, how could I possibly harbor these strange and immoral thoughts against such a small girl?"

"The problem is the girls will automatically approach you. From the past examples, there were quite a number of confirmed cases."

Even though she brought up so many things that happened in the past, Godou was still unable to comprehend what was so objectionable. Seeing Godou so troubled, Liliana smiled and said:

"But I do believe you are not the type to toy with young girls... I got it now, let us have a wager. Whether Mariya Hikari will become captivated by Kusanagi Godou or not."

What? Unable to understand the meaning of the knight's proposal, Godou was unable to answer.

"If the second daughter of the Mariya family does not develop romantic feelings towards Kusanagi Godou, then it is your victory. I will admit that you are a man who can control his charms. Regarding this issue, I will swear not to mention it ever again. But if she ends up wishing to stay by your side, and serve you--"

Liliana decisively spoke with great sternness:

"At that time, please grant me the right to manage your chambers."

Chambers, that meant something like bedroom, right?

"Recently I've been troubled by this, for Erica and Mariya Yuri have been competing as lovers, while I, Liliana Kranjcar, can only stand aside as your knight. Is that really for the best? I think this is the answer I have been looking for. Kusanagi Godou, I will not only be your sword, but assist in your personal life as well. If I win the wager, I will become your irreplaceable trusted adviser, close friend, housekeeper and subordinate, as well as maidservant. Please consider this for me, I will do everything I can in your best interests."

Godou began to consider, perhaps this was a wager he could easily win?

Watching Hikari in the distance, the girl who was the subject of the wager did not appear to have any signs of falling in love on first sight, or having secretly admired him from a long time ago. Hence, this girl definitely will not be infatuated with me. No problem.

Thus the troubled Yuri also declared she would never let something like that happen. Liliana was just digging a grave through strange delusions. I am sorry, but how could I miss out on such an easy wager?

"...I agree to this wager, how about a time limit of a month?"

"Acknowledged. So Kusanagi Godou, regarding how to solve this problem. Please allow me to offer my advice."

Liliana respectfully responded to Godou who had agreed to her proposal.

"About the Saitenguu issue, why not chat with someone more in the know? If you inquire using your stature as [King], the other party should not refuse you."

Now that it's mentioned, Godou had almost forgotten. The suggestion made Godou feel like he suddenly saw the light.

Part 3

After making an appointment, Godou and Liliana went together to the Sayanomiya residence on the street of Sanbanchou in the Tokyo special ward of Chiyoda. Due to duties or being in training, the two Hime-Miko remained at Nanao Shrine.

Entering the study, the person they wanted to see had been waiting for them.

The Tokyo Branch Chief of the History Compilation Committee, namely, Sayanomiya Kaoru, was wearing a grey dress shirt with a tie, as well as a men's suit. As always, the cross-dressing Hime-Miko was as beautiful as ever.

As a side note, her subordinate Amakasu Touma was wearing a worn-looking suit, on standby in a corner of the study.

"You already know about us, the Four Families, right? The Sayanomiya, Seishuuin, Renjou and Kuhoudzuka families leading the Japanese wizardry world. Each family has their own duties, and the Kuhoudzuka are responsible for guarding the Saitenguu at Nikkou's Toushouguu. This shrine was originally built to venerate the [Divine Monarch] in the early Edo period."

Sayanomiya Kaoru explained in a very clear voice.

"Oh." Standing behind the sofa couch Godou was sitting on, Liliana responded to the mention of the divine monarch. Apparently, she was more knowledgeable about Japanese culture than Erica.

"Saitenguu is the divine monarch's temple that is protected by a strong barrier and sealing spell. Following the orders of the Kuhoudzuka family, a Hime-Miko can use disaster purification to weaken the seal. Doing so allows the family to obtain the might of the divine monarch -- in other words, they can wield the divine monarch's power."

At this point, Kaoru giggled audibly with a mischievous smile which was also unusually seductive.

"Or put it this way, the Kuhoudzuka is a family that cannot complete their own mission without a Hime-Miko. Though it's not enough to make them lose their position, but it is definitely a massive embarrassment. Mikihiko-san is already confirmed to succeed the family next year. If he is able to fill the Hime-Miko vacancy during this time, it will add a lot to his reputation."

Hearing this explanation, Godou spoke out about a point of concern.

"By the way, so the divine monarch is a deity after all?"

"A god, yes, no mistake about it... Apparently an extremely troublesome deity."

Kaoru answered readily, while her trusted subordinate waiting on hand added:

"Yes, it is a great spell that required a life's work from our predecessor, a great figure who converted the heretic [Steel] into a sword protecting the nation, and then sealed it at Nikkou. Do I need to explain further?"

"Ah... No thanks, because I don't want to know too much about things involving gods."

Godou shook his head to reject Amakasu's offer.

He didn't expect it would be [Steel]. Hearing that term, it made him especially agitated.

"Thank you both for the detailed explanation. I'm sorry for suddenly bothering you all."

Kaoru and Amakasu were older than him, so Godou very naturally employed a respectful tone of voice.

"Not at all, for this kind of trivial task, we will answer you no matter the number of questions. For you are the devil king secluded in this world."

Kaoru smiled wryly. Though her choice of words was similar to the Kuhoudzuka gentleman's, there was no feeling of unnatural stiffness.

Her every motion was extremely natural and beautiful. Even a frivolous conversation would turn into a stylish joke. She was someone who possessed an incredible charisma, this androgynous personality.

"However, it is a position that has been vacant for almost a century. Whether the divine monarch truly exists, no one has confirmed directly, so it is very hard to judge."

Kaoru smiled mischievously.

"Despite Hikari's appearance, her personality is actually just as serious as her sister's. 'As long as it is within my ability, I will try my best... Even though I am a bit scared.' Something like that. So she is probably in a quandary right now. To be honest, I feel it is too risky. It is better to reject the offer. Sometimes it is necessary to protect oneself."

"Though sealed, this vacant position does require a miko to serve a [Heretic God]."

As his master explained with levity, Amakasu chimed in casually.

Godou nodded, after their explanation, the matter was easily understood. The Kuhoudzuka family directly started the recruitment process without detailing the risk of becoming the ' divine monarch's Hime-Miko' or the importance of the position.

In that case it was very difficult for Hikari to make a decision, and similarly he found it hard to make a suggestion.

"Is it possible... to have a trial run there and try it out first?"

Godou proposed his idea. Even a middle school third year baseball youth aiming for the National Championship would first make a visit to the high school of their choice. Letting Hikari try something similar, it was a very simplistic notion.

Hearing Godou's suggestion, Sayanomiya Kaoru burst out laughing loudly.

"Allowing someone other than the succeeding Hime-Miko to enter the forbidden depths of Saitenguu to try things out? That will definitely bring about divine retribution. Mikihiko-san is a very serious person, and he will definitely be offended. Your idea is perfect!"

Realizing his suggestion lacked common sense, Godou felt greatly ashamed.

If it was possible to have a trial run, then the Mariya sisters would have done it already.

"It's no good after all?"

"Normally, it will never be permitted, but in this case, it's the [King]'s decree."

With heart-felt joy, Kaoru took out her cellphone.

Finding the number from amongst her contacts, the call soon connected.

"Hey, is it Mikihiko-san? I am Kaoru. Actually I have something to discuss with you. That's right, about the Hime-Miko matter. After that, Hikari's guardian made a proposal... Yes, of course it is that esteemed one."

Secretly laughing to herself, Kaoru's voice was exceptionally serious.

The great devil king, vicious beyond compare, ordering the holy sanctum to be opened up for the sake of his beloved's younger sister. If Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko agreed to such demands, his situation would become precarious, but for the sake of national security, he would have to endure no matter what --

"Sayanomiya-san, I never knew you were someone like that."

"Yes, that is the kind of person she is, who loves to play pranks and tell lies, as well as being the champion of playboys three times in a row."

Speaking of such uncertain facts, there were threats at times, and tears on other occasions.

Godou and Amakasu sighed lightly as they looked at the cross-dressing beauty.

"Yes, as expected he couldn't agree immediately, but from the feeling I got just now, there will be an answer in three days. Kusanagi-san, you can leave this matter to me, Sayanomiya Kaoru! "

"Your concern... I thank you greatly."

Godou expressed his gratitude briefly to the History Compilation Committee leader whose spirits were rising to a peak.

Clearly she seemed like she was having fun, though she was also a very reliable friend. Anyway, let's wait for the good news. Godou got up from the sofa, and Liliana followed behind him.

As they were about to leave, Amakasu suddenly spoke:

"By the way, Kusanagi-san. If possible, could you pass along a message to Erica-san?"

A message? Godou was greatly surprised by this unexpected request.

"Two days ago, the young master of the Lu family from Hong Kong was sighted at Narita airport. I have not been acquainted with this gentleman, so if possible, I was wondering if she could help introduce us."

"The young master of the Lu family -- is that Lu Yinghua!"

Before Godou could answer, Liliana spoke out excitedly.

"Yes, Cult Leader Luo Hao's one and only direct disciple. Erica-san has met him before in Hong Kong. Could Liliana-san have met him too?"

"No... However, I have heard about him many times."

The sudden exchange made Godou a little concerned. Whose disciple was this guy?

"That whatever Cult Leader, is that a devil king like me who lives in China?"

"Yes, do you still remember, Her Eminence Luo Hao, leader of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains, the Campione who resides in China. One who rarely makes an appearance, a person impossible to judge."

Amakasu happily showed off his knowledge.

"In addition to Daoist and martial arts[30], she possesses god-slaying authorities... A super monster who happens to be on poor terms with Marquis Voban... Furthermore, the one who was trained in the martial arts of this great devil king, is the young master of the Lu family mentioned just now."

"I have often heard of his exploits, for he is famous as a most capable figure in Erica and my generation."

Liliana added.

"Actually within Japan, he is even more well-known than Erica-san and Liliana-san. After all, China is much closer to Japan compared to Europe. He is renowned for his outstanding qinggong[31] and powerful palm strikes."

In other words, he was extremely agile and a famous martial artist whose style featured palm attacks, explained Amakasu subsequently.

Godou sighed. He really didn't want to meet anything troublesome, but as luck would have it, he heard this hated kind of news.

"But after he left Narita, his trail was lost. If he plans on staying in Japan for a while, I think it's best to give him a greeting."

"Got it, I will let Erica know, but there's one question."

"A question? Be my guest, ask away."

Amakasu laughed "hoho", and once again, Godou found this man completely incomprehensible.

"I don't think you need to send a message through me. Wouldn't it be faster to contact Erica directly? It's not like you don't know each other."

"No no, my relationship with that lady should be limited to contact through either you or Yuri-san. That is enough. Of course, I will still contact her directly when necessary, but unless there was no other way, I shouldn't get too close to her... Anyway, thank you for doing this on my behalf."

The young man, who was a ninja descendant, bowed his head to Godou.

Part 4

Roppongi was in the Minato ward of Tokyo.

Standing amongst the headquarters of television stations and other skyscrapers was the Roppongi Tower.

With fifty-four stories, its full name was the Roppongi Hills Mori Tower and it stood two hundred and forty meters tall. The highest landmark in the area, even the rooftop of a twenty-one-story luxury hotel didn't seem very high in comparison.

At such a place, a young boy and girl were lying in wait.

With a fearless and dissatisfied face, the youth was standing on the edge of the roof.

It was ten minutes past midnight.

Watching the night scenery in boredom, the boy was roughly fourteen years old. With a proper well-proportioned face, he was wearing a black top along with black jeans.

Not far away, there was a crouching girl who looked about the same age as him.

Unlike the oriental youth, she was Caucasian with a head of brown hair and angelic beauty. However, her especially large eyes were filled with murderous and evil intent. This was a vicious countenance.

Those who knew about the supernatural incident at Los Angeles would probably have noticed.

Her name was Asherah, and two weeks ago, she was still the leader of the [King of Flies], the otherworldly witch.

"It's coming soon... Brat, get yourself ready."

Asherah reminded him, for she was using seeking magic to find the presence of the "target."

"You finally found it, Sis. This wait has been killing me."

The youth smiled. A casual and uncaring expression that was not cute at all. Asherah could not help but frown at his lack of tension. She once again gave her orders.

"Your failure is not acceptable. Put all your effort into it."

"I know. So, I will express my opinion too... After I catch that fellow, don't you fail now. If I get scolded by my master because of your mistake, I will make you pay back triple."

"What did you say?"

Asherah's evil eyes were full of the glint of disaster. The witch, who could curse a person to death just by her glare, only received a gaze of indifference in return. When necessary, destroy the enemy without hesitation. Such was the unrelentless will that could be seen.

"You're called Lu Yinghua, right? Clearly just a brat, but you sure have a way with words."

"Compared to quarrelling, I have something even more amazing. Even if my opponent is female, I will not go easy... In fact , a woman would make me even more aggressive instead. Would you like to try it?"

The youth -- Lu Yinghua slowly spread out his palms. He possessed slender and nimble fingers, while his broad palms had been forged hard and solid through training.

The two stared at each other, but the situation soon ended.

"That fellow has appeared. I shall catch up later. You go and get ready."

"Got it."

Following the directions of Asherah to sense the presence of the target, Lu Yinghua pressed his palms together.

Arguments and the mission had to be handled separately. The attitudes of the two instantly became serious.

"The target really did surface, Sis, those eyes of yours are really convenient."

Lu Yinghua looked down from the edge of the roof.

From the entrance of the hotel, the targeted young man was just walking out.

Wearing a high class custom-tailored suit, he was a very handsome man. By activating the flow of qi[32] from the energy center[33] below the navel, Lu Yinghua could clearly recognize the target's face even from the twenty-first floor.

Next, it was Asherah's eyes that tracked the young man's movements.

Using magic to enhance her vision and hearing, she had the entire interior of the hotel under surveillance.

This continued for several minutes.

...Until the target's high-class vehicle was confirmed to be leaving the hotel's car park.

"Then I'll be going, you can slowly catch up later."

Lu Yinghua spoke to his companion and then jumped. Leaping without any running start, he flew across the Roppongi night sky, his body tracing a trajectory towards the ground like a thrown object.

His jumping was like a shooting star; his flight was like a magic bird.

Flying down from the roof of the hotel, it was like hovering on the wings of a glider. Landing on top of a lower building, he flew once again, this time onto a street light on the side of the road.

The next time landed him on top of an electrical pole.

Flying yet again, this time was the wall on the fourth floor of a building. Kicking his legs he flew again.

With superhuman qinggong and jumping ability, he moved from height to height. His gaze was focused on the target's car making its way through the streets -- Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko's luxury car.

Against an automobile travelling at several tens of kilometers per hour, Lu Yinghua easily pursued with exceptional speed. Along the way, when the target entered the Shuto Expressway, he stopped on a neighboring car to conserve his strength.

After a few dozens of minutes, the target entered a surface road in Setagaya. Travelling along the quiet road, there were no other people or cars in the surroundings. At this point, Lu Yinghua used a new tactic.

He moved onto the roof of Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko's car.

Descending from the sky like a feather, the young heir of the Kuhoudzuka family was completely unaware of anything unusual as he clutched the steering wheel. Lu Yinghua landed on the car with neither sound nor impact.

And then he knelt down and gently tapped the car roof with his palm.

With just that, all the car windows were shattered -- the windshield, the two sides and the back. This light touch of the palm was able to smash all the windows without leaving a single trace on the roof. A miracle brought about by Lu Yinghua's palm strike.

The unexpected incident forced Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko to hit the brakes.

Stopping the car, he left the vehicle to inspect the surroundings.

"Young master, greetings for the first time. I already know your name, so let me give you mine."

Lu Yinghua jumped over the target's head and landed on the asphalt.

He didn't make a sound, nor was there any disturbance in the air.

"Lu Yinghua. However, there is no need for you to remember, for you will very soon forget."

"...I have heard of the powerful palm strikes associated with this name."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman muttered to himself as he reached his hand into the car to retrieve a wooden sword.

Heh. Lu Yinghua smiled. He made an expression as if surprised by the other person's response. At this time, the Kuhoudzuka gentleman suddenly made a thrust with the wooden sword. Aiming for the throat, there was no intention of mercy.

One shouldn't lose initiative due to pointless issues.

Lu Yinghua continued to smile as he faced the unexpected resistance from the target.

As he smiled, he used his hand to chop at the wooden sword approaching his throat, severing a quarter of the blade. Seeing his wooden sword transformed to a wooden club, the Kuhoudzuka gentleman was shocked.

"How slow, too slow. Your reaction is much too slow, it's almost like an imbecile. There is no value in using my palm."

Lu Yinghua approached casually, his footsteps as slow as a cow.

Nevertheless, the distance to the Kuhoudzuka gentleman was easily closed.

Smack! The Lu family's casual young master lightly flicked his opponent's forehead with the tip of his finger.

An attack with the middle finger, in other words, a forehead flick. Just like that, the young heir of the Kuhoudzuka family fell down unconscious.

As Lu Yinghua watched the unconscious target, a young girl descended from the sky.

The vicious young beauty Asherah. Unlike Lu Yinghua's repeated leaping, she used a witch's technique of [Flight] and really flew here through the sky.

"Looks like preparations are complete. Then this man's brain and heart belong to me now."

The witch approached the collapsed Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko.

"This kind of brainy spell is very difficult, right? Are you sure you won't have a problem?"

"Hmph, as long as I use my magical power, this is a trivial task, do not underestimate me."

Glared at by Asherah, Lu Yinghua simply shrugged.

"Whatever, this is not my area of expertise, I'll leave it all to Sis. Finish it quickly, and get to the next stage."

"Yes, the [Steel] that this fellow guards, happens to be your master's mortal enemy -- a [Heretic God]."

Asherah's evil eyes examined the unconscious young man on the ground.

"Hero worshipped from a rare era, the key to the sealed [Stable], let us use this fellow to accomplish our goal. Lu Yinghua, hurry and send this good news to Her Eminence!"

Part 5

The next day after visiting the Sayanomiya residence.

Lunch time on the roof of the high school section of Jounan Academy, familiar faces were gathered together.

Godou, Erica, Yuri, Liliana, the four of them were all involved with strange and secretive associations or mysterious shrines so they frequently met outside of school. On the other hand, they were equally likely to take off separately after school and do their own thing, leaving after a simple greeting.

However, they always gathered here for lunch every day. (On rainy days, it was the cafeteria.)

Without any agreement, it was just business as usual every day.

As a side note, Godou's little sister Shizuka who attended classes in the middle school section, also came here often, just not every single day. Though it was the same campus, the buildings were different, so she would only come when she found it too troublesome to buy bread at the snack shop.

Today Shizuka was not present, which allowed them to converse beyond the usual topics.

"Hmm--? That misogynistic guy came to Japan?"

Hearing about that Lu some guy or another from Godou, Erica stared wide.

"Misogynistic?"

"Yes, appearing to be very popular with the ladies, but exceptionally stubborn and repressed. He holds a particular grudge against beautiful and capable females, so I am one of those he detests."

Whenever Erica described herself as powerful and beautiful, she definitely had her good reasons.

"Back then, when I often had the chance to chat with him, it seems like there was a very powerful and violent woman close to him. That was probably why he developed this weird kind of oppositional defiance, or perhaps there was some kind of early childhood trauma."

"...In other words, he is a strange fellow."

Erica nodded to agree with Godou's conclusion.

"He is an extremely strange person, but a genius like a demon, whose martial arts prowess even exceeds Sir Salvatore. One day he will leave behind a reputation like Mozart or Da Vinci."

"Even more amazing than that idiot... It can't be?"

Godou couldn't help but make sure. He had once experienced firsthand with his body Salvatore Doni's exceptional skill with the sword, so it was very difficult to believe.

"In terms of overall natural talent, no doubt about it. Didn't I say all along? Sir Salvatore's only godly skill is the sword. Before becoming a Campione, his bodily constitution could not even store magical power. What we call magical power, is known as 'qi' to Chinese users. Do you understand what that means?"

Hearing Erica's question, Godou immediately thought of " martial arts = kung fu = qi = qigong[34]?"

Furthermore, magical power was what fueled spells and authorities. Compared to an ordinary mage, a Campione's body contained several hundred times the magical power. Godou had heard this before.

"Correct. Commonly known as qigong, Chinese martial artists call it neigong[35] A master in neigong will have their body surrounded by strong magical power. In addition to being applied towards magic or Daoist arts, it can also be used in mystic techniques of martial arts."

Just like a warrior in a RPG can consume MP to use a finishing move? Godou recalled the games that Shizuka played and tried to imagine.

"So without reaching a level of neigong equivalent to the mastery of unarmed and sword skills, one cannot learn the most advanced mystic techniques in martial arts. The sword skills of our knights follow the same concept, swordsmanship and magical power have to be trained at the same time. For his talent to lie exclusively on one side, Sir Salvatore can only be described as a heretical genius."

The heretical genius, user of the evil sword that deviated from the norm.

Godou could agree to that, for it was a very apt description that suited that man very well.

"As much as possible, avoid entering a confrontation against that guy. In terms of penetrative power and mobility, I may be outmatched... However, I am confident that a violent conflict will not develop between us."

Erica spoke with a slightly displeased expression. It was only natural. The [Diavolo Rosso] was about using wits and excelled at strategizing. As long as she had the intention, she would brutally target the enemy's weaknesses, reacting like an intellectual criminal to obtain final victory. However, her true nature was a knight who liked to make a direct frontal charge.

Winning a direct battle was the true reward of the battlefield. It was very dangerous to enter a direct conflict with those who adhered to this aesthetic, which meant that for the sake of victory, she could discard her pride.

"Anyway, let's hurry and start having lunch -- Ah, Yuri seems to have brought quite a few things today?"

Setting the unpleasant subject aside, Erica looked at today's lunch.

"Ah, yes. If possible, everyone please share."

Yuri took out a lunchbox containing catfish rice.

The other lunchbox was packed with fried egg, kinpira[36] burdock, Chikuzen style chicken stew, teriyaki mackerel, pickled Chinese cabbage, etc, while the thermos contained miso soup with seaweed and tofu.

Erica took out an assorted platter of Chinese dimsum[37], with shrimp dumplings, crab roe shaomai, and sticky rice dumplings with fillings of pork and chestnuts. One glance was enough to tell it was prepared by the maid and assistant Arianna. Though it was a shame it had already cooled off, it was still very delicious.

And Godou decided to thank the heavens, for there was nothing pot stewed.

"Mariya Yuri, what is with you? Just like Erica said, your lunches recently have been especially generous?"

Receiving the paper cup filled with miso soup from Yuri, Liliana asked with an incredulous tone of voice.

"Hikari's matters have troubled everyone lately, so I thought I should return the favor slightly..."

The beautiful Hime-Miko replied shyly. Due to the increased number of participants, everyone had been bringing less lately. Even if she hadn't prepared extra due to Hikari, the number of dishes she brought were still quite numerous.

"Pay it no mind. Caring about a girl close to him is a [King]'s duty, this sort of thing is completely trivial... I also do not think there was any additional trouble."

"Yes, I understand."

Liliana spoke as she picked up a thick piece of fried egg, while Yuri remained embarrassed.

The silver-haired blue knight was very calm, awe-inspiring and composed. This sort of declaration was full of her unique style, an act only possible for someone who had committed to some sort of great decision.

Ever since the wager yesterday, this kind of atmosphere persisted.

As if waiting for the next step, silently gathering power --

Godou turned his head to the side and looked at Erica. The blonde red knight was watching her old friend and rival with incredulous eyes, as if hesitating before an animal, wondering if it was a rare beast or a ferocious beast... something like that.

At this time, something vibrated amongst Yuri's belongings.

Beside the bag carrying the lunchboxes, the cellphone was ringing.

"Sorry, please do not mind me, everyone go ahead and eat first."

Reading the call display, Yuri got up politely. Leaving the spot they were gathered at, she took the call at a corner of the roof.

"Kusanagi Godou, I have also prepared dessert for today. Thanks to the praise for the previous cake, I attempted some other varieties, please try this with fig jam."

Liliana suddenly opened a lunchbox, a cheesecake neatly arranged within it. On the side was a small jar containing an orange-colored jam. Since it was her, this was likely homemade as well.

"How rare, Lily, you used to stick with just the main course for lunch."

Erica often enjoyed speaking with subtle tones and meanings, but this time she was rather direct, and even bore a suspicious expression.

Liliana did have such a preference in her cooking just as Erica described, most likely because she wished to claim the lead position on the lunch table, and subconsciously decided to do the main course.

"Just preparing main courses to make everyone full is too ordinary, it is good to do something like this from time to time... Always in the spotlight, someone like you may never understand this feeling."

The silver-haired knight spoke calmly, though her words ended on a competitive note.

...In actual fact, though not to the same extremes as Erica, Liliana also attracted a great deal of attention. If this wasn't the case, the red and blue pair would not have been able to become rivals. Though that was the truth, for Liliana to foster such a notion , it was most likely what happened yesterday that prompted her change?

"What happened today, Lily? You seem slightly unusual?"

Finally, Erica asked directly.

"Not unusual at all... Only that I have decided with determination, as the premier knight serving by Kusanagi Godou's side, public recognition by him and others around him is imminent , so I must act and think in a manner worthy of this position and responsibility."

Liliana's answer was very solemn, and her tone was firm and powerful.

"Therefore Erica, towards your actions of seduction, I will consider turning a blind eye to them. The one in charge cannot be jealous of a mere lover. Of course, this is conditional on whether your actions have any ill effects on Kusanagi Godou's schedule."

This declaration delivered with such a superior attitude, made Erica cast a sinister glance at her.

"Ah? In other words, very soon you will become Godou's most trusted partner?"

"In about a month -- right, Kusanagi Godou?"

Liliana furtively looked at Godou, she had absolute confidence in victory.

Yes, but not really. No matter what, with those conditions, Godou was certain he will not lose.

"Looks like there's some kind of secret agreement? But for someone to be the premier knight and lover, simply might and magic are not enough. What is important is the capability to advise a king, to have wit and strategy, diplomacy, the art of conversation and negotiation... Can you do all that, Lily?"

A very elegant smile appeared on Erica's face as she questioned, presumably the beautiful side effect of her rise in fighting spirit. Subtle behavior as befitted the [Diavolo Rosso].

"I acknowledge your small-minded cleverness, but to treat it as the talent to be a king's adviser, is that not boasting too far? Trust is the most important thing between a king and a knight. In this regard, I will prevent his sincere heart from being stolen by others. "

Liliana was extremely calm. In a serious debate, Erica would have won, but the current development was unprecedented.

"If you say so, then show me your ability as the premier knight... How about the current issue about Lu Yinghua's arrival in Japan, what's your opinion?"

"Oh, you mean that matter of Cult Leader Luo Hao's direct disciple."

Liliana lightly nodded at Erica's playful question.

"Well, though it is an unsophisticated reaction, I think being on alert is the most crucial. There is a possibility that the demonic cult leader is planning some kind of commotion in Japan, and sent her disciple over."

"Yes, just like Marquis Voban. So being prepared is best."

Erica responded to Liliana's sudden unlikely suggestion.

"The likelihood of that is close to impossible. However, in the past six months, I've finally realized it. Campiones always light up every glowing ember around them into a fire disaster. Godou is this type, and so are Voban and Sir Salvatore. Cult Leader Luo Hao should be no exception."

"That is correct, they are all notorious for causing trouble for no reason."

The two knight's predictions were akin to delusions of persecution mania, and Godou simply dismissed them as impossible speculation.

By the way, please don't lump me with that group of people in such a matter-of-fact manner.

"Anyway, the point of contention lies on Cult Leader Luo Hao, whose appearance and personality are complete unknowns, as well as what kind of deities she had fought in the past. Erica, you once stayed in Hong Kong, please let me know if you have any information about her."

"Regarding information on the Cult Leader, those involved in Chinese circles are even more strict in guarding their secrets. It is rumored that cult believers are obliged to blind themselves if they see her person, and cut off their own ears if they hear her voice."

As the conversation progressed to this point, Yuri returned from her phone call.

"Godou-san, I really must thank you for this."

Yuri's sudden expression of thanks puzzled Godou, what on earth happened?

"The call just now was from Amakasu-san. Yesterday, Godou-san requested a temporary trial at Saitenguu, and the Kuhoudzuka family has already agreed."

"Uh, really? Didn't they say we had to wait?"

"Though there are no precedents, but it is the [King]'s request after all, so they can only accept. They told us we can go over to Nikkou any time as soon as we are ready."

Her head bowed respectfully, Yuri's excellent upbringing from early childhood was apparent to all, acting like a true Yamato Nadeshiko[38].

"For you to lend your power for the sake of my little sister Hikari, I am truly thankful. As the older sister, let me express my gratitude here."

"Gratitude is not necessary, I virtually did nothing."

"Of course, I will also thank Kaoru who did the actual negotiations, but first let me express my gratitude to Godou-san here."

Yuri replied with a calm and grateful smile. Due to her elegance and respectful attitude, it was hard to take offense. If Godou did not accept, he would feel like he was the unreasonable one. Smiling wryly, Godou nodded.

"So, Mariya Hikari's problem is solved now. I should say it is wonderful."

Liliana concluded.

Godou suddenly had a thought. The (supposed) leader of this group here should be Kusanagi Godou, while his next-in-command was Erica Blandelli. This has always been the distribution of roles.

Now that Liliana wants to squeeze in as his next-in-command, was it a good or bad idea after all?

"Right, Yuri, has the dates been set for the trial?"

Erica suddenly asked.

"Yes, this coming weekend happens to be a three day holiday, so that will be the time."

"Oh... I suppose Yuri will be going along?"

"Of course, since I am her older sister, and a Hime-Miko like her ... Is there a problem?"

Erica's subtle question made Yuri reply in puzzlement.

"Then I have a suggestion. Yuri's sister is equivalent to being the younger sister of Godou -- as well as all of us here. Therefore, why not have everyone go along together?"

"What did you say?"

"Godou, with just the answer from the Committee, it doesn't mean your duties are over. You have to take full responsibility, and protect Hikari to the very end. If that child receives unfair treatment, what are you going to do?"

The [Diavolo Rosso]'s words were correct, but the corners of her lips showed a smile of anticipation, and her eyes flashed like a mischievous child.

"Actually I have some things I want to investigate, and there are famous sightseeing destinations and scenic spots in the surroundings of this temple. The timing is perfect, everyone, let's go for a visit."

Godou sighed. In the middle of her speech, he already discovered her motives.

Erica had made a very good point about taking full responsibility, causing him to recall what Sayanomiya Kaoru had mentioned. The divine monarch was definitely not a safe existence.

And though it was sealed, but what if there was a [Heretic God] --

Godou made his decision to travel to Nikkou.

Nikkou National Park's boundaries were very broad and not only included Tochigi Prefecture but also Gunma and Fukushima.

And speaking of Nikkou, of course there was Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine, Rinnouji's Nikkou Mountain as well as the area around Okunikkou. Not to mention scenic spots like Nantaisan, Lake Chuuzenji, or Senjougahara.

Saitenguu was a shrine built in a corner of Nikkou Mountain.

Compared to the splendor of Toushouguu and Futarasan Shrine to the west, it was a quiet holy sanctum removed from the usual tourist destinations.

Within its confines, Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko was making a cellphone call while wearing shrine attire.

"Even Kusanagi-sama will be making his grand arrival? Of course we extend our utmost welcome. Right, yes, please pass along my greetings to Hikari-san..."

A young boy and girl were listening in beside him, they were Lu Yinghua and Asherah.

"How amazing, from that manner of speaking you really can't tell that he is being controlled by Sis."

"Of course, I am one who stands amongst the pinnacle of witches."

The girl answered the youth's praise with disinterest.

She stared at Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko like a puppet she had grown tired of playing.

"The only trouble is, not only is the miko who will be used as the key, but even Kusanagi Godou -- this country's [King] is coming, that presents a slight problem."

Lu Yinghua's ears not only heard Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko's voice , but even all the sounds on the other side of the phone. What a beautiful voice, slightly high pitched for a male, but a bit low for a female...

"Hmph, let him come if he dares. I was willing to take a gamble against John Pluto Smith. For a brat who hasn't even been a Campione for a year, it will be a piece of cake."

"I see, the reason Sis failed in Los Angeles, I finally understand now."

Lu Yinghua sneered at the evil-eyed witch in high battle spirits.

"...Damn you."

"Sis hasn't truly understood what troublesome existences these [Kings] are. It has nothing to do with experience for these people. At the time they usurped a god's authority, before they even became a Campione, they were already transcendent existences. Though Sis and I are both masters of our craft, even the weakest [King] will be far more powerful than us."

Lu Yinghua described the Campione with depressed eyes.

"They are not people who can be defeated by the likes of techniques, spells, strategies or traps. Even though my martial ability likely surpasses five of the seven [Kings], I dare not compete in a frontal confrontation. People like them always find a ' path to victory' no matter what kind of opponent they are facing. Whether you have exceptional talent, or a hundred years of training, everything is futile against them. That is why they are called kings."

The youth who had spent ten of his fourteen years of age with his master, explained gloomily.

"Letting kings fight it out is the best course of action. We just need to stick to our own duties."

"Then... Are you going to call for your master?"

The most vicious, the one who had reached the martial pinnacle , the Campione who sought defeat but never found it.

Lu Yinghua nodded.

"It is necessary. Tell her that if she doesn't show up, the plan will be obstructed. Persuade her with everything you got, and then respectfully welcome her grand arrival. After all, she has to come sooner or later for the sake of meeting the divine monarch. Earlier should be better than later... That is what I think..."

Recalling his master's unreasonable obstinacy, the vigorous youth sighed.

"Otherwise if we are met with failure, I can't imagine what kind of terrible punishment -- I don't even dare think about it. We might as well go ahead and invite my master who is usually too lazy to go out. It'd be more practical to just suffer a few heavy punches and be done with it..."

Towards the holy sanctum of the temple in the Far East, the actors were converging onto this stage.

It would take a few more days before they gathered in one place . Meanwhile, the signs of the brewing storm intensified.

Chapter 4 - Palace of the Divine Monarch's Throne

Part 1

The Mariya sisters, Yuri and Hikari, as well as their guardian Kusanagi Godou.

...Plus Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar who were following along for some reason.

Using a three-day long weekend in early October, the five of them planned a little trip to Nikkou. Rather than taking a train, it was more cost effective to go by car.

A certain participant's maid volunteered to drive, but Godou politely declined. Even though his life was already full of peril, there was no need to add to his unnecessary troubles.

So, how should the driver problem be resolved? After some consideration, Godou called a certain person.

'If you don't mind, let me assist you guys. I'll also prepare the car. No no, don't thank me. After all, I'd also like to investigate the inner secrets of the Kuhoudzuka family.'

Godou happily accepted the proposal, and on the afternoon of the first day, everyone gathered near the Kusanagi residence.

That day when everyone made their way towards Nikkou --

"Hey, Amakasu-san."

Barely one hour into the trip, Godou already regretted the decision that he clearly didn't think through well enough.

From the passenger seat, he inquired from the driver next to him.

"From Tokyo to Nikkou in Tochigi, I think we should take the Touhoku Expressway, right? That should be the fastest route, so why are we going by surface roads?"

"When travelling, the process before reaching the destination is also very important."

Holding the steering wheel, Amakasu Touma replied seriously.

"Listen carefully, this Nikkou Kaidou[39] has existed since ancient times and runs from Nihonbashi[40] to Nikkou Toushouguu where Tokugawa Ieyasu is worshipped, and of the twenty shukuba[41] along the way we have already passed Senju-shuku, Souka-shuku, and Koshigaya-shuku. In the past, people used to walk along this path by foot."

Toukaidou, Nakasendou, Koushuu Kaidou, Nikkou Kaidou, and finally Oushuu Kaidou.

One of the Edo Five Routes[42], Nikkou Kaidou had become a national and prefectural route. Amakasu explained with great solemnity as they rode this seven-passenger minivan.

"Seeking convenience and doing things faster is a nasty habit of modern people. Kusanagi-san, don't you think we should learn about the journey of the ancients, and experience for ourselves the hardships of the past?"

"No! All I want right now is to get there as quickly as possible to end this hellish torment!"

As the two men conversed in isolation, the girls in the back were chatting away with great excitement.

This in itself was not a problem. However, it was what they were discussing.

"S-So Erica-neesama is Onii-sama's principal wife?"

"Yes, that is correct. Hikari will stay and serve by his side in the future, so you'd better be obedient, and assist your older sister Yuri well."

"In other words, group cooperation is very important...!?"

"Not exactly. Rather than have everyone getting along in harmony, it's better to maintain a level of competition. But competing has its time and place, otherwise there will be a problem during a crisis, so knowing the hierarchy is the key. As long as you know whose orders to take in an emergency, most problems can be solved easily."

"Wow... I've learnt a lot, Erica-neesama is just like Ena-neesama described, a very amazing person."

"Is that how Ena described me?"

"She said you are very powerful, possessing a mind that rivals Kaoru-san, plus a very arrogant personality."

"I am honored, but that last description is unnecessary. I am not arrogant, instead, it should be said that I am very great. Next time Hikari sees Ena, you'd better correct her on this."

"I got it, nee-sama!"

"Erica, do not take advantage of her innocence to indoctrinate her with a bunch of wrong ideas. Calling yourself Kusanagi Godou's principal wife, that is going too far!"

"Ah, everyone knows that is the eventual future outcome, right? "

"At least I do not think so. From my view, you are just an evil scheming vassal who will lead the lord towards a dark future... Mariya Hikari, you would do best to first forget everything Erica said, then remember this: a real knight does not let oneself be bound rigidly to their position and responsibilities."

"Li...Liliana-neesama! What does that mean!?"

"Knowing your place is admittedly important, but it is not everything. No matter where you stand, silently offering your all to the lord is the most important, for that is the true way of the knight. Bragging that she is the principal wife or first lady, indicates that something is wrong with her cognition."

"Don't be bound by hierarchy, and devote myself to Onii-sama... Yes, that's the idea."

"Yes, for you to understand this kind of noble spirit, I expect good things from you."

"Right, so as long as we become Onii-sama's 'convenient women ' it's fine right?"

"Con... Convenient -- little children should not say things like that!"

"Hikari! Where did you hear that from!?"

"Ena-neesama told me, the previous heads of the Seishuuin family had 'convenient women' everywhere, and treated them as their lovers, and would at least take up the minimum responsibility of supporting their daily needs... Onee-chan, Onii-sama will take care of me, right?"

"U-Ummm... I say... Our relationships with Godou-san are not that decadent..."

"But that is what Ena-neesama said, Kusanagi Onii-sama is very manly and generous, so all the surrounding women will be charmed by him. Though she regrets that she cannot monopolize him together with Onee-chan, it can't be helped if the king pursues a life of debauchery..."

"Please do not mention such things so loudly, too shameless!"

"Ooh, is that so? By the way, what does debauchery feel like?"

"Ah, Hikari sure is eager to learn. Fine, let me tell you, this is a real story I heard back in Hong Kong --"

"E-Erica-san! I am begging you, please spare her this kind of explanation."

Besides her sister, Hikari had become friendly with everyone else, without being aware of it, she already called them all " Onee-sama."

A personality that was nowhere near bashful. Godou liked that point about her, but her talkative character needed a little work... However, if he turned around to remind the back seats, it would only have the effect of alerting them without achieving his aim, so Godou spoke to the driver instead.

"Hey, Amakasu-san, can you give me contact information for Seishuuin later?"

"Oh, planning on some love talk on the phone?"

"No, absolutely not. Later I am going to send her a text message of complaints. Also, could you let me off at the next station? I'm going to take the train by myself."

"Come on don't be like that, travelling requires companions. Let's admire this scenery on the road together. By the way, we are just about to pass through Kasukabe-shuku which is the first shukuba where Matsuo Bashou[43] stayed in *Oku no Hosomichi*[44].

Godou glared at the giggling Amakasu.

"How can I be happy with those kinds of conversations going on in the back! Do you understand the feeling of sitting on a bed of nails! If you aren't going to let me off the car, then at least drive quickly to Nikkou!"

"Hahaha, don't get angry, it's not often to have a chance to go for a spin like this, you should be a little more happy."

Wearing an unassuming outfit, the History Compilation Committee member laughed heartily. He probably picked this route deliberately to maximize delays.

Describing his boss as loving to play pranks, he was just the same.

The tormented Godou aside, everyone else was enjoying the trip to Nikkou.

After the lively journey, Godou and his group reached their destination at about one in the afternoon.

Despite many places being severely congested, the group was fortunate enough to be unaffected.

Nikkou Mountain was where Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine and Rinnouji were located.

It was still too early for the season of red leaves, but true to its reputation as a tourist vacation spot, there were still many visitors paying respects, making it very lively and bustling, though not to the degree of being packed with people... There were many tourists of both genders and all ages, people travelling alone or as a family, lovers, or group tours, etc... Basically all sorts of people.

Amakasu stopped the minivan at the car park and everyone else got off first.

And then they reached the main visiting path[45].

Before the entrance of Toushouguu flanked by cedar trees, the first torii[46] could be seen in front, entering it would reach Toushouguu while Nikkousan Rinnouji was to the right and Futarasan Shrine was found by following deep along the left path.

"By the way, Liliana, where are we staying tonight?"

"Right, I already booked a room nearby, so do not worry about the noisy crowd over there. Furthermore, according to your orders, I also picked a hotel that was less expensive."

Liliana replied to Godou's inquiry with a very capable tone of voice.

She had always had a habit of paying attention to small details, and thus was very suited to handling these kinds of errands. In this area, she was completely different from Erica.

"Yes, Lily, I want one where I can wear a yukata, with outdoor hot springs like those open air public baths, so that I can drag Godou out at night and enjoy the night sky together as we bathe."

Erica drifted into a seductive smile.

This blonde girl had particular talents in politics, strategy, and negotiations. She was also very aware of the big picture and understood economics. However, mundane and sundry affairs, as well as delicate tasks like cooking and the economic mindset to go with it, were not her forte. If given such tasks, she probably could still complete them, but Godou will definitely not assign these jobs to her.

"The place we are staying tonight does offer open air baths, but requires reservations. As long as Kusanagi Godou wishes, I will make arrangements..."

"Oh? Is that so! Godou, let us enjoy the two of us together!"

"Who is going to enjoy that kind of thing!"

Godou angrily snarled and rejected her offer.

Erica had her reasons for not arranging these things herself. From the looks of it, the rivalry between Erica and Liliana was still in Erica's favor, and she was able to maintain this delicate balance indefinitely.

As a side note, the Mariya sisters who accompanied them on this trip...

"So, Godou-san, it is almost time to set off."

"Onii-sama, we're finally about to reach the shrine at Saitenguu, I'm feeling a little nervous!"

They had spoken, ignoring the conversation between the knights.

Serious Yuri had already grown accustomed to Erica and Liliana's excesses, and would not nag them with righteous principles. As for Hikari, she was the type who could quickly get along and make friends with anyone. Her having this kind of flexibility was really wasted here. Godou increasingly had thoughts like that.

"So, we'll start our separate activities now. Lily, is that OK?"

"No other way, if we came along with you, we might end up being in your way."

And so Erica and Liliana took off, because going for the trial at the shrine of the divine monarch, it would be best to avoid having outsiders present.

"By the way, has Mariya ever visited that whatever temple?"

"Yes, I came here once before I became a Hime-Miko, but I only entered the main hall and did not go into the sacrosanct."

Yuri advanced towards the torii of Toushouguu without hesitation.

Following behind her was Godou and Hikari.

Nikkou Toushouguu, was the mausoleum and temple built to venerate the deified Tokugawa Ieyasu -- Toushou Daigongen. As a luxurious and magnificent shrine, there were frequent visitors from school trips. The official tour route consisted of climbing the stone steps up towards the five-story pagoda, passing through the torii, entering the worship hall through the famous gates of Youmeimon, then the main hall, and finally entering the Okusha inner shrine.

But halfway through, Yuri led them towards an unassuming looking building.

Speaking of Toushouguu, it was a luxurious space built by the equivalent of several tens of billions of yen in modern day terms. It gave a golden shiny impression, and was full of sculptures and delicate little decorations.

But over there was a very small and undecorated building, very different from the five-story pagoda and the Omotemon gate seen so far. However, there were still many tourists and it was an unexpectedly popular scenic spot.

"It feels like this place is particularly dull, since all the others are so magnificent."

"This is the Shinkyu Sacred Stables... The building that binds the fateful connection between Toushouguu and the divine monarch."

Yuri replied to Godou's first impressions. Sacred stables? Godou noticed there were two horses in the stalls, which meant that this was a barn for keeping horses.

"Onii-sama, look quickly, there are monkeys!"

Hikari pointed with great liveliness at the wall of the building.

Along the lower edge of the eaves of a typical house, there were many carvings of monkeys. A whole clan of monkeys, there were monkeys covering their eyes, monkeys covering their mouths, monkeys covering their ears, sitting monkeys, monkeys watching the sky, monkeys sprawled and lying around. In total there were ten-odd monkey sculptures.

"Ah yes, that's 'see no evil, say no evil, hear no evil.'"

Three monkeys that covered their eyes, mouth and ears respectively.

This was a famous sculpture, and seeing it here made Godou finally recall.

"Right, from ancient times, there was a rumor that monkeys can cure the illnesses of horses, so this stable is full of monkeys!"

"Oh, I did not know that, what relation does Tokugawa Ieyasu have with monkeys?"

Hearing Hikari's recited explanation, Yuri asked with a surprised expression.

"Didn't you know? The divine monarch is not Toushou Daigongen!"

This time it was Godou's turn to be surprised, if the divine monarch worshipped at Nikkou Toushouguu was not Tokugawa Ieyasu, then who on earth could it be?

Realizing she was too subjective, Yuri hurriedly apologized.

"I am really sorry, because I heard that you already received information from Kaoru so I thought you knew everything already . Though Saitenguu is a part of Nikkou Toushouguu, it is dedicated to a different god, and is an independent holy sanctum."

"The divine monarch worshipped at Saitenguu is called the monkey divine monarch! He is the incarnation of a monkey, and the protector of dragons. Actually, that's all I know."

Hikari felt a little embarrassed.

Why does a monkey have to protect dragons? Godou pondered puzzled, no matter how you look at it, a dragon should be much stronger than a monkey. Probably some kind of complicated mythological reason again.

"So, let us head to Saitenguu, please follow behind me."

Yuri took out a rectangular piece of a paper -- a charm. Asking her the reason, it turns out Saitenguu had a barrier that repels humans.

With Godou and Hikari following her, Yuri held the charm and entered a vast forest behind Shinkyo Sacred Stables.

This was the intermediate area within Toushouguu that led towards Futarasan Shrine. Very inconspicuous, none of the tens of tourists noticed it.

After following Yuri in the forest for ten-odd minutes, Godou already had no idea where he was.

The three of them finally reached an ancient shrine.

"Welcome, I have been waiting for everyone."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman came out to greet them, wearing Shinto shrine attire.

Behind him was Amakasu who they had left behind earlier. He probably arrived first by taking a different route. Adhering to his role in the background, he only greeted Godou with a glance.

"We Kuhoudzuka of this shrine are greatly honored by the arrival of the [King]. Very soon, the doors to the sacrosanct will be opened and you will be able to meet the divine monarch. Please wait a moment."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman welcomed them cautiously and respectfully, but Godou was perplexed.

"Did you just mention meeting the divine monarch?"

"Yes, for a trial at Saitenguu, the best course of action would be having a direct face to face conversation with the divine monarch she will be serving in the future. As long as Hikari-san can use disaster purification, the sacrosanct can be opened, which is why this method was selected."

I see, it was as he said, as long as there was no substantial risk.

"But isn't it dangerous to meet with a [Heretic God]?"

"You are completely correct. Since that is the case, we will do as you requested. You will accompany Hikari-san together into the sacrosanct and meet the divine monarch together."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman's suggestion made Godou deep in thought.

If he meets a [Heretic God], wouldn't there be trouble? They were natural enemies hardwired on a genetic level, if a great battle began from this at Toushouguu, it would be a huge problem...

But letting Hikari see him alone was also too dangerous, and Godou was the one responsible for forcing them to allow this in the first place. At this time, the guardian should be accompanying her.

Godou had no choice but to nod.

Godou, Amakasu and Yuri despite her spirit vision did not notice.

Today's visitors at Saitenguu included a nonhuman existence, a tiny lizard that watched these people superciliously from a corner in the area.

Since it was close to the ground surface, it was very hard for tall humans to notice.

Its eyes carried a haughty royal presence, and as the Kuhoudzuka gentleman led the miko forward, the lizard began to move languidly.

Moving with leisure, as if it was the ruler of this place.

Part 2

In preparation for the meeting with the divine monarch, Hikari changed into a miko outfit.

Led by the Kuhoudzuka gentleman to the Shamusho[47] building, her sister Yuri also followed by her side.

Though Godou was offered a waiting room, he refused because he didn't want to create trouble for others, and waited with Amakasu in the vicinity of the Shamusho.

"...The Kuhoudzuka family has surprisingly few people here."

Godou pointed out what he noticed. Other than the Kuhoudzuka gentleman, there were no other people.

Currently, Godou and Amakasu were the only ones present.

"Since it is the day when the sacrosanct of the monkey divine monarch will be opened, most likely everyone was dismissed other than the young master in charge. His way of handling things is appropriate for opening a divine seal that has been untouched for a century."

"Anyway besides that, why do they worship a monkey deity here?"

Shouldn't they worship a more advantageous deity?

As if hearing Godou's thoughts, Amakasu smiled slightly wryly and scratched his head.

"You say he is just a monkey, but he is actually a very useful divine beast. Unexpected, right?"

"Curing illnesses of horses and protecting dragons... That's what I heard just now."

"Oh, so you already know. Furthermore, he has other important attributes, such as vanquishing evil. Kyoto is a place inhabited by monkeys. This place is located at the *Gen*[48] position relative to Kyoto -- in other words, the northeast. In onmyoudou[49], the northeast is regarded as the demon gate, namely the direction from where demons and evil spirits invade."

You see, northeast -- *Gen*'s opposite is the *Shen*[50] position of southwest, which is why the monkey is used for vanquishing evil, that was how Amakasu explained, somewhat inexplicably happily.

"Using the monkey to establish a formation as a guard for the demon gate, is one of the most prided wizardry techniques of the Tendai[51] monks."

"Tendai...? That Tendai from Mount Hiei's Enryaku-ji[52]?"

"Yes, by the way, the Buddhist High Priest Tenkai who designed Nikkou Toushouguu, apprenticed at Tendai originally."

Mount Hiei is located to the northeast of Kyoto -- the position of the demon gate. Amakasu added.

High Priest Tenkai. Godou had heard this name before, known as Tokugawa Ieyasu's think tank, he was a monk with great wisdom. He served until the third Shogun[53], Iemitsu.

"The religious device known as Nikkou Toushouguu was constructed for the sake of deifying Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu as the guardian god of the country. As for the secretly built Saitenguu here, it is the shrine for worshipping the dragon slayer vanquisher of evil, the monkey divine monarch."

"Why would they choose this place deliberately...?"

"Because relative to Japan's supernatural center, this happens to be the position of the demon gate, so the worship of the country's guardian deity Lord Ieyasu, as well as the evil-vanquishing monkey god, were both established here.

Godou was intrigued. What was the supernatural center?

"You'll understand if you look at a map. Japan's symbol, the sacred grounds with the highest energy -- is the holy peak Mount Fuji. Nikkou is northeast relative to it. Yes, according to records, the monkey divine monarch has gone out from Saitenguu a number of times."

"Letting a [Heretic God] run around outside? Isn't that very dangerous!"

"You are correct. A hundred years ago, when the divine monarch was last released, the entire Saitenguu and related personnel were blown away, and the current shrine was rebuilt after the incident."

Who knew there was this kind of back story.

Godou felt increasingly worried. Was this really OK for Hikari?

"How did the [Heretic God] leave if it was sealed with so much effort? Also, why would an escaped deity return on its own?"

"If you want an explanation, then I will have to start telling stories about gods, the kind that Kusanagi hates the most."

Come to think of it, though Amakasu explained about religion and wizardry, he did not go into any detail about gods. Was he paying attention to my reactions? Which was why he then continued and gave the following explanation:

"The reason why he came back, was due to that great wizardry spell mentioned before that required a life time's work. The magical power gathered from sacred sites around Japan is converted into the divine power of Toushou Daigongen, and then used to restrain the monkey divine monarch. Even when he went out to cause havoc, he was obliged to return and accept being sealed in the end."

"...This kind of thing is possible!?"

Godou was overcome with surprise. No matter how many human magi were gathered, a super powerful [Heretic God] could never be defeated. This should be unchangeable truth.

"This kind of thing is impossible, so how was it actually done? Kaoru-san and I firmly believe, that this set up must have been the culmination of the ancient sages' wisdom."

Ancient sages -- in other words, the current successors of those residents in the Netherworld.

As they chatted away, Yuri returned but Hikari and the Kuhoudzuka gentleman were nowhere to be seen. She had also changed into a miko outfit.

"Mariya, why are you wearing a miko outfit? And where's your sister?"

"Hikari is talking with Mikihiko-san right now. Godou-san, can you take me along to see Monkey Divine Monarch-sama?"

Yuri pleaded with a determined expression.

"You want to come too? No way, meeting a god is too dangerous."

"Precisely because it is dangerous, if anything happens, Godou-san will surely protect Hikari, right? In that case, I have to be there as well."

Realizing Godou's intentions for volunteering to go, and due to her ability to obtain knowledge about gods through spirit vision, Yuri concluded that her presence would be a crucial deciding factor if a battle broke out against a god.

"I cannot allow myself to hide in a safe place knowing Godou-san is taking a risk for the sake of my younger sister. I beg you, please."

Yuri pleaded with sincerity. To be honest, Godou was very grateful for her care and concern for him, but if he had to receive knowledge from the beautiful Hime-Miko, then it would have to be through that kind of behavior --

Seeing Yuri's adorable cherry lips, Godou recalled that incident.

Probably thinking the same thing, Yuri also started to act awkwardly, appearing very embarrassed.

"...I-If something... like that happens, I-I completely do not mind ..."

Combined with her extremely soft murmuring, Godou felt a great shock numbing his brain and became speechless. He couldn't help it, to think she would say something like that.

"-- It is true that there is a risk, but taking Yuri-san along will confer many conveniences. In consideration of the goals of this undertaking, there is no need for you two to act separately."

Stuck in their own world, the two of them were suddenly brought back by the appearance of a calm voice. Godou had quite the surprise, and Yuri most likely as well. Right, that guy was still here!

As the two of them turned to look, the unassuming youth was grinning to himself.

"Although it's a little sad that my existence was forgotten, it's nice to see how far your feelings for each other have progressed. Back to the subject, Godou-san what do you think? Will you accept my suggestion?"

"T-Then let's do it! P-Please, I am in your care, Mariya!"

"Yes, right. Then I shall be relying on you, I am unworthy, please take good care of me."

Due to being over nervous, the two of them began to speak incoherently.

"Sorry for making everyone wait! ...Eh? Did something happen? "

The long-awaited return of Hikari and Kuhoudzuka Mikihiko dispelled the awkward atmosphere.

At this time, Amakasu silently saluted with his eyes and left. Though he was a member of the History Compilation Committee, to Saitenguu he was just an outsider, hence very tactfully he departed.

Unexpectedly, the Kuhoudzuka gentleman readily agreed to the addition of yet another participant.

Thus Godou and Hikari, as well as Yuri, were taken to the depths of Saitenguu.

"--Strange? What is with this sword?"

Hikari was carrying a kodachi[54] in her arms. Its scabbard and hilt were made of white wood, and appeared to be a precious blade with substantial history.

"Ah, its name is Zanryuutou.[55] In order to meet Divine Monarch-sama, it is necessary to bring it along."

"Like the divine monarch, this blade is the precious sword that protects Saitenguu."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman added.

"Come to think of it, there are also shrines that venerate blades as divine possessed objects."

Then there was nothing strange. Feeling that it is something he understood, Godou continued walking. They were taken to an ancient shrine that was not very large or glamorous.

Like those very simple and modest ancestral shrines often seen on the side of country roads.

Short trees grew in the area, probably peach trees.

The shrine and the surrounding peach trees were enclosed by shimenawa[56], giving off intense magical power. The rope itself was probably the barrier.

"This is the shrine of the monkey divine monarch. So, Hikari-san, please do as I explained just now."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman stepped back, leaving just the shimenawa in front of them.

Godou stole a glance at the interior of the shrine. Nothing could be seen. Though the gridded windows were in poor shape, the interior was in complete darkness.

"T-The shrine requires a Hime-Miko in order to weaken the seal of the [Keeper of the Horses], then it can be opened."

Hikari's voice was trembling.

The unabashed apprentice Hime-Miko began to get nervous. Since they were going to meet a [Heretic God], nervousness was only natural. Come to think of it, what did [Keeper of the Horses] mean?

Under Godou and her elder sister's gaze, Hikari placed her hand on the shimenawa.

The rough straw-braided rope fell to the ground, and the surrounding magical power vanished.

"Amazing, so the shrine is open from now on?"

"No way, this is a barrier that seals away a deity. It cannot be dispelled completely, and once the effect wears off, it will automatically restore itself."

Yuri explained from beside him. Only temporarily weakening strong magical power, along the same principles, there was little lasting effect on a Campione or a god's authority.

"T-Then I am opening it...!"

Hikari declared in a shaking voice as she opened the gridded door to the shrine.

The inside was still very dark. That said, they had already come this far, so there was no choice but to keep going.

"I will enter first. Mariya and Hikari follow after me -- Kuhoudzuka-san, my apologies for making all these willful demands."

"Don't mention it. It is my honor to be of assistance. Please watch your step."

The Kuhoudzuka gentleman answered in an almost monotonous voice.

And then became silent. His body was also motionless? Somehow he felt like a clock that had run out of batteries. Though Godou felt the youth's appearance was quite strange, he still stepped into the shrine and had the Mariya sisters follow him.

After walking in the darkness for a while, it felt like the ground had become hard and solid like concrete, and was unexpectedly easy to walk on. But visibility remained poor, and they couldn't see anything around them. It was completely dark.

The only things that were certain, were the presences of the two sisters following behind him.

"Everyone, please do not get separated, let's hold hands together, here, grab on to me."

"Y-Yes. I know!"

Yuri replied to Godou's call.

Extending his hand backwards, Godou found himself holding a gentle and soft hand.

"Hikari, hold my hand. Right, that is fine, no problem."

The older sister's gentle voice directed her younger sister.

In other words, the hand Godou held was Yuri's. For some reason, he suddenly found his face getting hot, and there was an inexplicable heart racing feeling. Perhaps Yuri also felt the same way.

Every time he became aware of the touch of her small and frail hand, Godou could not stop his mind from wandering into unnecessary thoughts.

Having walked for a few minutes, or perhaps ten-odd minutes, the sense of time was completely lost.

"Godou-san... Have you realized it?"

Yuri suddenly questioned seriously.

Godou straightened his back and sobered. She seemed like she had something important to say.

"We have arrived in the Netherworld, that realm we entered last time... The path in Saitenguu's shrine, most likely is a corridor between the real world and the Netherworld!"

"Onee-chan. By Netherworld do you mean *that* Netherworld?"

"Yes, the Boundary of Life and Immortality, the void kingdom between the human world and the divine realm. The gap world called Yomotsu Hirasaka.[57]"

Hearing the sisters' exchanges, Godou wanted to hold his head in his arms and yell.

"The barrier sealing a deity away... On further thought, this is possible after all. However, Mariya you two appear to be fine. Are your bodies feeling any discomfort?"

Remember Erica's painful experience, Godou couldn't help asking them.

His Campione identity aside, ordinary humans cannot adapt to the environment of the Netherworld, right?

"Thanks to the power it bestows upon us, I think this corridor allows us mortals to get used to the Netherworld. That is what I feel."

Using the power of spirit vision, Yuri confirmed it.

Looks like there was some meaning to this slow walk through the darkness.

"...Wait a minute, for us to be in the Netherworld again, can't we use that instantaneous transfer like last time?"

He recalled the method of transfer he made so many attempts last time and suffered much for it.

Godou aside, Yuri with her talent in spirit vision could probably accomplish it without problems.

Well... Teleportation was probably meaningless when meeting the monkey divine monarch. But Yuri's answer was negative.

"No, it appears not. I just tried recalling the view of the Netherworld from before... But was unsuccessful all along. It looks like there is no way to teleport outside of here."

"What is the situation?"

"This place is isolated from the rest of the Netherworld, for it is the cage imprisoning the divine monarch."

Once again hearing Yuri's confident report, this must also be a hint obtained through spirit vision.

"Got it... But I really don't feel like staying in this place for long."

In the instant he sighed, the exit appeared. At around ten-odd meters away (the distance that Godou's eyes could reach), there was a rectangular hole where light was entering.

The three of them quickly walked over there, hand in hand.

Everyone had arrived safely, and they squeezed themselves through the rectangular hole. There was a little worn-looking shack with no inhabitants. It was probably the stable, just like the one they saw just now at Toushouguu.

Outside there was a brightly shining sun under a very refreshing blue sky.

In the distance was a very grand looking structure. A huge building... No, it should be called a city or a palace. In addition, it was not Japanese style in construction, but resembled a Chinese palace like the Forbidden City.[58] This was the stables within the territory of the palace.

Watching the outside scenery, Godou suddenly became aware of the delicate feeling in his hand.

He was still holding the Hime-Miko's hand even after the Mariya sisters had let go of each other. Making eye contact with Yuri, the two of them blushed and quickly turned their face away, immediately releasing their hands.

"...Ah, there's a monkey over there."

Without noticing her older sister and Godou's behavior, Hikari pointed to a corner of the stable.

Upon the hay was a lounging monkey.

It did not look like a Japanese one, for its face was not red and the fur was very bright. Its body, covered with golden fur that approached a shade of orange, was about 80cm in length. Seeing the appearance of the monkey, Godou was certain.

This guy was a [Heretic God], for Godou's body and heart had already entered a battle-ready state, that was the best proof.

"Welcome to my palace, it's been so long since there were guests . And to think there's even a god-slayer!"

The monkey spoke in a clear and bright voice as it got up. Its motions were very human-like, like a nimble little child jumping up from bed.

Godou was already beyond the fact that the monkey could speak, so he calmly asked.

"So, you are the monkey divine monarch?"

"That's what the fellows who shut me in here call me. I should have a much cooler title, but it's being sealed currently."

Amongst all the deities Godou ever met, this one was the most friendly and outgoing in personality. No, that's not right. Though Godou had no memories of having met a god as frivolous as this, he still felt there was some deity similar to him. Who could it be? As his head began to hurt, Godou gave up for now.

"Actually, the smaller girl here, has been agonizing over whether to become your miko or not, so today I brought her here just to have a look at the environment."

"Oh that's right. Now that you mention it, no miko had come over to play recently."

"Play?"

"Yes. The various miko who come to play with me. Sometimes we chat or play games like hide-and-seek or Sugoroku.[59] I like things to be fun and lively oh, so if they know how to sing and dance, I give them better ratings."

It appeared that the vacant position of the Saitenguu Hime-Miko, involved spending time like a shepherd. Except taking care of a monkey instead of sheep.

No, instead, it should be described as a monkey handler.

"Excuse me, could it really be enough to just play with Divine Monarch-sama? I thought it was a very important mission that only I could accomplish, so I am feeling quite lost right now..."

What? Hikari actually said it out loud.

Not a single sign of shyness, however, this was probably because the other guy didn't display any solemn majesty of a god.

"Come on, don't say it like it's just playing around with me, that's a little rude, you also need to help me groom my fur oh... That's all I ask for. On the other hand, it's you guys who keep making troublesome requests for me to fulfill."

"We... You mean the Hime-Miko?"

"Yes, like asking me to chase that snake, or drive away that dragon. Sometimes they come begging with tears? So every time I had to leave this old nest, and go rampaging outside like before."

"Drive away dragons? Aren't you supposed to protect dragons? "

Godou suddenly interrupted with the explanation he heard just now at the place with the three monkeys.

"I protect them alright, but that's after I beat them up and make them my flunkies. Don't judge me by appearance, I am also a member of [Steel], so handling dragons and snakes is just business as usual... To this date there have been one, two, three commotions now. The last one was probably the time I quarreled with you?"

After hearing the monkey divine monarch's response to his question, Godou was left pondering in puzzlement.

I've never quarreled with you. What on earth was that?

"I was beating up some earth dragon in a certain city, and then you came along to pick a fight. But before a victor was decided, my time limit to return to the old nest had arrived. Weren't you planning on kicking down the door of the shrine back then?"

"Yes, because I thought doing so would allow me to reach your habitat."

This time Godou was completely shocked.

Suddenly a woman's voice was heard, carrying a melodic grace, it was a refreshing and beautiful voice.

"In the end, I blew away the shrine and the surroundings, but was unable to enter the corridor... Counting by our calendar, it was a hundred years ago. However, your exquisite methods -- the godly skill you employed to subdue the dragon god that laid waste to Tokyo, are still fresh in my memory."

Godou followed the monkey god's gaze.

In the stable, a lizard had somehow entered without him noticing.

Clearly just a mere lizard, but its stately and dignified posture gave a great presence of solemnity. Just the sight of it was enough to make one feel like cheering out in admiration. What could this reptile be?

The one talking to the monkey divine monarch, was this guy without a doubt!

"It cannot be, it cannot be you -- !? How! Why have you appeared in such a place!?"

Yuri cried out as she covered her mouth.

The Yamato Nadeshiko[60] with her excellent upbringing and high class manners, was actually losing composure to such an extent.

"What is it, Mariya!?"

Yuri's face paled and her lips trembled as she kept staring at the lizard.

She was shaking incessantly from fear, and Godou approached the Hime-Miko hoping to comfort her.

"G-Godou-san. The one over there... The one there is --"

She saw something with spirit vision? Trembling and tongue-tied, Yuri appeared to be overcome with terror. In order to calm her down, Godou placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, looks like a Hime-Miko, I see, as expected of the distant relatives of the divine ancestors. For you to be able to discern my true nature, I commend your vision."

White smoke was coming from the lizard's body.

In the next instant, the tiny reptile transformed into a beautiful girl.

One worthy of the description transcendent beauty, a girl with black hair and wearing ancient Chinese attire -- Han clothing.[61] Her upper garment had very long sleeves and a lower hem that hung low. The lower garment was like a long flowing robe which resembled a kimono due to its style of overlapping the left portion over the right.

"What is your name? It should be fine to ask your name, right, god-slayer of my homeland?"

"I must have been too immature back then. How regrettable for me to fail in branding my name deep into your memory. Then I shall present my name once more, and proceed to sentence you to death for the crime of forgetting it."

The beautiful lips declared coldly to the monkey divine monarch:

"My surname is Luo, with the given name Cuilian, and style name[62] Hao. The leader of the holy cult, the one standing astride the martial pinnacle."

The fearsome demonic cult leader, Luo Hao, who was also called Luo Cuilian.

The third one to appear after Salvatore Doni and Dejanstahl Voban. The newest Campione for Godou to encounter, was a maiden as intense as burning flames.

Part 3

Choosing to act separately, the knights came to Futarasan Shrine, a very peaceful site surrounded by cedar trees. In contrast to the bustling Toushouguu, this sacred domain was very quiet, and could be described as full of an ephemeral sense of wonder. An excellent place for one to calm their mind and find peace.

However, this clearly didn't suit Erica Blandelli's character very well.

"This place is not bad, but too boring. Let's go somewhere more exciting next."

"You still like the hustle and bustle so much? I prefer this kind of quiet place."

Liliana laughed. As a side note, that "somewhere" Erica referred to, was of course Toushouguu with its gold leaf decoration and golden colored Buddhas.

"I still prefer the mood over there. Lily's tastes are so strange, you're aging too fast oh, I hope the place we're staying tonight won't have the same feeling?"

"Not like we are staying at a group room in a monastery, besides, how could such rooms exist in the first place!"

A conversation that could not be described as arguing or chatting.

The free-spirited Erica Blandelli and serious Liliana Kranjcar. Though their personalities appeared to not get along, they often acted as a pair together. Even so, initiative in their private lives was held firmly in Erica's hands.

This was clearly the way things were, but recently Liliana had been wanting to reverse this situation.

What on earth happened to her? Testing her, Erica said nonchalantly:

"By the way, Lily, how is it going with your trying to become Godou's premier knight?"

"Not bad at all, though I personally do not wish for certain things to happen, but overall everything is advancing as I expected . One day, I will be Godou's right hand for sure."

Liliana answered with a hint of sadness in her voice, but no clues were yielded at all.

Erica knew very well, that this blue knight's confidence easily wavered. Using all sorts of methods to disrupt her composure was the fastest way to conquer this old silver-haired friend.

"I see, but I still think you're unsuitable. It is true that Lily is a person who pays great attention to details, but for better or worse, you always miss the big picture."

"Miss the big picture? Are you insulting me?"

"Not an insult, but simply rational criticism. Think about it, rushing into things without consideration and leaving everything to your natural potential, barely scraping by to overcome trials and tribulations, that is your true character, right? Therefore, trying to force yourself to be an all-rounder strategist just doesn't suit you well at all."

Even though she was joking around, Erica spoke the truth.

It might be harmless if you told someone who was gradually slimming "did you get fatter?" But on the other hand, it would be great shock if you said it to someone who was slightly fat.

This type of criticism usually angered Liliana, thus accomplishing the first step in shaking her confidence --

However, Erica's plan was foiled by the following answer.

"...Up until now, perhaps it is as you say."

What was going on? Liliana was nodding with an exceedingly serene expression! Usually she would have denied vehemently saying "no such thing!" but with her confidence greatly shaken!

"But Erica, for the sake of helping Kusanagi Godou -- my one and only lord, I must change myself. Therefore, even for the things I have been unable to do so far, I must strive to overcome them."

A declaration made in an extremely easygoing tone.

"This is not like you... Lily, what happened exactly? Did Karen tell you something unnecessary, or did you receive strange orders from the Bronze Black Cross headquarters?"

"Nothing like that at all. It is nothing, I simply had a change in mood, that is all."

Liliana smiled.

It was apparent that finding out her secret agreement with Godou was imperative. Erica stole a glance at the expression on the face of her rival and long-time friend, greatly displeased at her calm demeanor. These were early signs that warranted investigation.

--Humans were not the type to change themselves so easily.

Of course, it was not that uncommon for people to set new goals or find new determination when prompted by some cause.

However, those who persevered to the end were few and far in between. Habitual smokers who declared "I will quit starting tomorrow!" most likely break their promises within a week. If the person was Liliana, would it be any different? What if her purpose for change was for the sake of Kusanagi Godou?

Then it could get dangerous. Liliana Kranjcar was a maiden with a disposition towards delusion. Her ability to pursue dead end thoughts to the very end could be described as number one in the world. This kind of maiden loved to indulge in the fantasy of " doing things for the sake of her beloved."

Her weakness lied in her unstable confidence.

This newly surfaced mental crutch could very well support her against this weakness.

Already a rare genius in mind, body and technique, plus martial arts rivaling Erica, and even a witch's disposition that Erica lacked. Liliana was unexpectedly capable in particular niches, and paid great attention to detail.

It was only due to her weakness in mentality that allowed Erica to dominate her so easily all this time. However, if this strategy no longer worked... In any case, it would be best to just observe for now, intervening with strategy once the situation demanded a halt to Liliana's transformation. One must be well prepared first.

Just as Erica contemplated, concerned over her old friend...

The two of them had just passed through Futarasan Shrine's torii and were taking a small path towards Toushouguu... And they met a youth and a girl walking towards them.

"Lu Yinghua... You really came to Japan."

Erica quickly adjusted her thoughts. One of the two, was the young master of the Lu family from Hong Kong that she had not seen for two years.

"How unexpected..."

Also recognizing Erica, he seemed a little shocked, but immediately showed a likable smile.

"It's been a while, Erica-neesan. What a coincidence for us to meet in such a place."

Spoken extremely politely, but the expression was very stiff.

One could feel the prejudice in his heart and his eyes looked quite dangerous.

"The famed young hero Lu, it really has been quite some time. However, can you call this a coincidence? For the young master of Hong Kong's house of Lu and the Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross to meet at a Japanese tourist destination so easily by chance? One might think there would be some other factor other than coincidence."

"Is that so? I'm completely stumped."

In response to Erica's greeting, Lu Yinghua deliberately shrugged nonchalantly.

"Though there were some disagreements in Hong Kong two years ago, let's consider it water under the bridge and forget those unpleasant memories."

"An excellent suggestion... By the way, the one beside you, who may that be?"

After the typical pleasantries, Erica looked at the young girl and asked:

"How surprising for a misogynist like you to be strolling around with a girlfriend. Right, by the way, let me introduce my companion. She is Liliana Kranjcar -- Great Knight of the Bronze Black Cross, and my longtime friend."

Introducing her as a friend. In the past, Liliana would surely have denied vehemently.

However, this time she silently observed as things unfolded. Lu Yinghua's mere standing posture hinted at his true power. Preempting all kinds of emergencies, he had slowly released his power, and entered a stance-less style of preparedness.

On the other hand, the vicious looking girl with the beautiful face beside him was no less alarming. Erica could suddenly feel the released magical power from her body, and she was likely a very powerful mage.

It was impossible to judge from appearance the age of top level magi, especially females.

Once a mage's magical power developed to the most skillful level, they obtain the ability to rejuvenate their bodies to a certain degree. In other words, they appear much younger than their real age. And this rejuvenation effect was much more potent for women than for men.

"This is Asherah, though she is under my lead, she is not my girlfriend. Half a month ago, she was still in Los Angeles doing all kinds of things."

Unsure of her origins, Lu Yinghua gave a simple introduction of his companion.

"Liliana Kranjcar is a name I have heard before, a Great Knight on the same level as Erica-neesan, and serving the same [King], right?"

Disparaging Erica and Liliana so naturally at the same time, Lu Yinghua still hadn't changed his unpleasant way with words.

Ignoring the insult, the [Diavolo Rosso] nodded.

"Yes, the one named Kusanagi Godou. You must have heard of him?"

"Of course, he is the Rakshasa King as the seventh Campione, and the youngest devil king of the Far East. One day I hope to be honored by his presence... Is something I would never say. If possible, I wish to never meet people like him for the rest of my life."

As Lu Yinghua chattered away tactlessly, the girl named Asherah began to complain.

"Hey, Lu Yinghua, meeting them here must be due to the direction of ill fate. Before these girls get in our way, let's finish them off here right now?"

An evil proposal of mockery. However, Erica did not change her expression.

Liliana beside her was the same, though the atmosphere was tense from the very beginning.

"Sis... The reason why you failed in Los Angeles, was because you like to pick fights with others without consideration of your opponent's personality. You've got to be more cautious, and use more diplomacy."

"Hmph, after all no matter what, Her Eminence will find her way to the monkey king."

Lu Yinghua couldn't help but sigh as Asherah answered in a sinister voice.

"The warriors in this country are nothing to be feared."

"--Her Eminence!? Cult Leader Luo Hao really came to Japan after all?!"

The name that could not be ignored. Liliana questioned immediately.

Erica also showed eyes of disdain.

"I originally thought it impossible, but it came true after all... Doesn't she shut herself in the Mount Lu convent all day long and hate going out?"

"Yes, it is true that my master dislikes going out, but she is also a master of Divine Traversal."

Really, it's true, Lu Yinghua shook his head.

"As long as she wills it, she can come and go anywhere in the world in an instant. For Daoist arts[63] to reach such unreasonable heights, it's incredible that I somehow don't admire her at all."

The Art of Terrain Reduction -- Divine Traversal, was a Daoist art that allowed instantaneous travel. Erica had heard of it before.

Using this Daoist art was normally costly in time and money for preparation. In the modern technological world, planes and trains were far more convenient. But just as Lu Yinghua said, if one could master this art, extremely costly in magical power, to be performed in an instant --

She was a Campione, as well as the peerless practitioner of Daoist arts, and the martial artist who trained and nurtured such a disciple.

Seeing the legendary demonic cult leader possess such monstrous capabilities, Erica took a deep breath.

"Ah... Because summoning her made me lose consciousness three times, and I almost met my father in that other world. Come on, I'm not a sandbag..."

Seeming like he was complaining about something, Lu Yinghua's glare suddenly became very sharp.

A haughty and overbearing expression, it seemed much more lively than the stiff smiling face just now.

"So, our two nee-sans here, why don't you calm down a bit. We are not planning on fighting you yet. The kings are still in Saitenguu for a summit meeting of the leaders. Let us decide what we're going to do after they come to a conclusion first!"

Chapter 5 - Ruler of the Martial Realm, Commands the World

Part 1

At the stable in the Netherworld, the unexpected visitor bore eyes of disdain.

"What a tragedy, for the heroic god of the lost age to have become so lowly and diminutive, like a domesticated animal... There should be limits to uselessness, please have some shame."

"No, even if you call me an animal. It is just as you see, I am an animal from the very beginning."

Severely admonished by the beautiful Cult Leader Luo Hao, the monkey divine monarch simply nodded, completely unfazed.

That's right, he was a monkey from the start. Just as Godou was thinking --

"...Wakoku's king[64], are you thinking something disrespectful? "

Eh! Godou received a stern stare from the cult leader.

Godou was very shocked. Clearly he hadn't said a single word, but how were his thoughts known!?

"Foolish, I, Luo Hao, have reached the pinnacle of martial arts, and I am the one called the Ruler of the Martial Realm. Your insolent thoughts are apparent from the change in facial expressions."

Is that so? ...No, wait a minute.

Impressed with her feat, Godou immediately began to ponder. In other words, she only guessed?

No matter what, the other person was a Campione. Godou was initially scared that 'this woman can read minds!?' but it turned out to be something different.

"Another disrespectful thought. What a shame, Wakoku's king sure lacks manners."

Luo Hao quietly expressed her dissatisfaction.

She was guessing after all, no, not exactly guessing but deducing the other's inner thoughts through the subtle change in expression. Even so, her sight was amazing.

"If you weren't a [King] as my peer, I would absolutely not forgive your insolence, and you will surely be punished accordingly. However, as your senior along the same path of domination, I shall generously forgive you. Thank me well."

"...Thank you very much."

This person probably looked down on everyone with those eyes of despise.

Every single Campione Godou has met turned out to be weirdos with various peculiarities. To avoid her judging himself as being rude, Godou was determined to maintain an expressionless poker face.

"The same applies to those two miko there. Normally, anyone who lays eyes on my appearance has to be punished."

Speaking dangerous words, Cult Leader Luo Hao gazed upon the miko sisters.

Even the bold Hikari could only say "S-Sorry!" in fear, while Yuri suppressed her own trembling body and tightly held and protected her younger sister, replying "I-If we must be punished for our insolence, please cast all judgment upon me as the older sister!"

The two have clearly lost their calm.

It was likely the result of the icy oppressive presence born from Luo Hao's beauty and splendor.

In truth, she was even more terrifying than Marquis Voban in certain ways. At least that elderly man had an intellectual facade which felt like a certain level of dialogue could be undertaken. But Luo Hao was different. In complete contrast, it felt like she would instantly order your beheading if you spoke out of line.

"You miko must know your place, and restrain yourselves from addressing I, Luo Hao. Currently I am having a conversation with my peers, a [King] and a god, and have no intention of letting you in my sight."

"S-Sorry."

"Our utmost apologies, Your Eminence!"

The declaration made with an inorganic voice, made the two sisters tremble incessantly.

Cult Leader Luo Hao's words of reproach were not out of wrath , but fell under disinterest.

"May I ask, if they are not allowed to look at you directly, how could they converse?"

Though he expected some kind of unreasonable answer, Godou still felt like asking.

"Someone of my stature obviously cannot have a direct conversation with commoners. Those who lay eyes on my body must gouge out their own eyes; those who hear my voice must cut off their ears in penance. But since there are extenuating circumstances right now, I will let it pass."

"Don't talk like those emperors of the past! If you don't want to be seen, just cower behind a veil or a curtain!"

Hearing her surprising answer, Godou could not help disapproving.

But even more extreme twisted logic came out of the cult leader's mouth.

"...You're called Kusanagi whatever, is that correct? King Kusanagi, your argument is mistaken. I am the martial pinnacle far surpassing all emperors, conquerors and generals of the past and present, oriental or occidental. Thus entitling me to enjoy prestige beyond the comparison of any other ruler. This is what is known as hierarchy."

Uttered with the same natural tone of voice as one would say " gravity exists on earth," she expressed this most ridiculous point of view.

These outrageous words completely killed off the sense of beauty and perfect cleverness displayed by Cult Leader Luo Hao.

"So, if you say you are more amazing than any emperor or king in history, what evidence do you have?"

"Obviously my authority and martial arts. Luo Cuilian can slaughter thousands of soldiers with a simple punch or kick, and slay tens of thousands with just a wave of a blade or a spear. Were I to display the true essence of martial arts, mighty armies of millions will be turned into mountains of corpses and rivers of blood. All lands will be wiped out, leaving nothing but mountains and rivers."

"No! Could you think a little more along the lines of politics, economy or culture!"

Godou needed to confirm just in case, but it really was as expected, perhaps she was even more dangerous than Doni or Voban? The previously known devil kings still maintained some manner of social life, but Cult Leader Luo Hao seemed to be an exception? A fellow with a completely abnormal outlook on life.

Godou decided to change his current goal.

Impossible to communicate with her normally, it would be better to discuss the current pressing concern.

"Just now you said you were going to fight the monkey god? Let's ignore the matters of your sudden appearance and illegal trespassing for now. But please tell me, why?"

"To exterminate this god."

Cult Leader Luo Hao replied immediately.

The monkey acted completely unconcerned, and maintained that cheerful smiling expression. Godou turned to face Luo Hao once again.

"Clearly the hero of my country, but to be raised as a pet to play with the Japanese... His crimes are completely unforgivable. Knowing this kind of fellow exists, I, Luo Hao cannot allow him to live for it would be a taint to my honor. That is why from a long time ago, I have waited for the opportunity to carry out judgment."

"Ah... So you came to Japan specifically for this reason?"

Come to think of it, Sayanomiya Kaoru also mentioned he was a "troublesome god."

It looked like things were very complicated, but Godou had no interest in the details. Deciding it was better not to know, Godou asked the monkey god:

"So if that's the case, how about you guys duke it out right here? If it's the Netherworld, there shouldn't be any harm to the human world, right?"

"Yes, you are thinking 'this way, it has nothing to do with me', it is completely obvious."

Godou did not refute the monkey divine monarch's criticism.

"Yes, that is completely right... But if you have a century-long grudge like this, it's not something I can interfere. As long as it doesn't affect human society, anyway you handle it is fine."

"Though righteousness is a virtue, in a situation like this, I'd say you are tactless."

"What does that have to do with anything!? Every time I'm forced to fight with gods and devil kings, I can't stand it!"

Hearing Godou's objections, the monkey divine monarch stroked the fur on his chin.

"The fellow who built this palace used wizardry to seal my divinity of violence. Thanks to that, a [Heretic God] became a monkey that only jokes around, however --"

The monkey, who claimed to only joke around, gazed at Cult Leader Luo Hao with troublesome eyes.

"This friend here, perhaps would like to restore my original nature for some reason. That would require satisfying some complicated conditions, but her sneaking in here is indicative of her preparedness... But let me remind you all, once I recover my heretical self, it is likely that I will return to the real world like a flash of lightning."

"W-Why?"

"There's no one here in the Netherworld, my heretical self would find it completely uninteresting. Whether playing practical jokes or causing trouble for others, it's only fun if there are the people of the world as targets."

In other words, protecting human society from the evil clutches of the monkey divine monarch meant getting in Cult Leader Luo Hao's way --

Godou looked in shock at the transcendent beauty.

The living legend who lacked both common sense and understanding of the mundane world. However, his instincts as a Campione warned him that she was very dangerous. As an opponent in battle, she likely belonged to the worst type...!

"Despite your useless appearance, you are surprisingly self-aware. Then things are easy."

As if commanding the world, Cult Leader Luo Hao made her declaration:

"You shall be revived next, and I will dispel the curse of the [Keeper of the Horses]. Is that all?"

"T-Then the reason that miko holds the treasure blade, was also your doing? That is why I felt it was strange, clearly there are no dragons here, but they brought that thing along."

Looking at Zanryuutou[65] in Hikari's arms, the monkey divine monarch began to grumble.

"There are three conditions to temporarily release the [Keeper of the Horses] spell that seals me in this place. First, the appearance of a dragon or snake deity, the enemy of my kind. Secondly, the treasure blade that cuts and weakens spells. Third of all, a disaster purification capable Hime-Miko must wield the treasure blade to use spirit powers."

In other words, Zanryuutou was a treasure that should only be used in crisis situations?

Godou began to agitate, could the Kuhoudzuka gentleman be in cahoots with the cult leader? Or was he being threatened...

"Preparing a dragon or a snake deity is the most troublesome -- However, someone happened to offer herself as a sacrifice, so it's resolved. Despite my unparalleled might, capturing a god alive still poses a challenge. Originally, I had already prepared myself to give up on another chance to fight you."

Magical power suddenly increased.

The demonic cult leader's body suddenly released vast amounts of magical power.

Godou could tell that she did not activate an authority. Otherwise, his skin would be able to sense danger, just like the time when he witnessed Marquis Voban's authority.

However, this enormous amount of magical power completely dwarfed the magic used by Erica and Liliana. From this it was certain, Cult Leader Luo Hao was a spell practitioner far surpassing the magi in Godou's company.

"Now that a candle-shadow stands on the screen of carven marble --"[66]

From the beauty's throat came a lyrical rhythm, reminiscent of harmonious melodies. It was a soothing beautiful voice.

"And the River of Heaven slants and the morning stars are low / Are you sorry for having stolen the potion that has set you / Over purple seas and blue skies, to brood through the long nights? "

This was a magical incantation.

But Cult Leader Luo Hao recited it with great musicality.

Godou immediately regretted calling her weird. The reason why her character was so problematic was precisely due to her natural talent and well-honed skills. In that instant, such a thought entered Godou's mind.

"Whom can the lonely Moon Goddess take as her neighbor!"[67]

Finally finishing her spell, what was going to happen?

Godou cautiously surveyed the surroundings, Yuri nodded, and then Hikari --

Held by her older sister, Hikari forcefully pushed her arm aside, and with hollow eyes, drew out the treasured blade, Zanryuutou, from its sheath of white wood.

"Godou-san! That treasured blade is the key for releasing the divine monarch's seal, and Cult Leader Luo Hao has injected massive amounts of magic to awaken the blade, and released the spell sealing the blade! Hikari has also been caught up in it!"

Yuri yelled out loudly having used her spirit vision, and there was no time to hesitate!

"Wait... Wait a minute! Luo Hao, hold it for a second! Are you planning on letting that monkey descend on the earth and cause havoc!?"

Eschewing honorifics, Godou reproached Luo Hao. Somehow he could never harbor any respect for elders when facing these fellows called Campiones, how vexing.

"Aren't you a very great king? Then please think of the people!"

"You are correct, I am the Ruler of the Martial Realm, the conqueror that none may oppose. My will is the will of the heavens and the truth of the earth. However, in my view, humans are undeserving of mercy or benevolence. From the perspective of the earth and the sky, it is debatable whether human existence is good or bad..."

How could such a problematic character obtain divine authority ?

Watching the cult leader convinced of her righteousness, Godou sighed.

Damn it. Looks like words were a waste of breath, and only brute force remained...! As he made his decision, the transcendent beauty smiled. It was a spectacular otherworldly expression that added great color to her existing beauty.

"I see, my young eagle was right sometimes."

Right about what? Godou was puzzled.

"To come here to Wakoku where the young devil king was born , as long as trouble was caused in his territory, a conflict with him was unavoidable no matter what. Only a king can match another king, which is why he urged me to come here -- hohoho, who would have thought his words were so prophetic?"

Cult Leader Luo Hao drew near lightly.

Danger -- just as the thought entered Godou's mind, his shoulder was caught.

"King Kusanagi, thank the heavens that you have the chance to learn from and exchange blows with the martial pinnacle. I will treat you as my obstacle, and defeat you with the martial arts of Luo Hao!"

In the instant the cult leader waved her wrist, Godou found himself flung high in the sky.

Godou's body crashed through the roof of the stable and flew up into the heavens.

To think her arm strength could be this horrifying! Or was it a mystic martial arts technique!? Watching the increasingly wide and complete view of the Chinese-style palace beneath him, Godou trembled in fear.

Part 2

It was not long after meeting Lu Yinghua and the girl named Asherah.

Erica felt enormous amounts of magical power exploding from somewhere nearby. Someone was clearly using high level magic, and the powerful aftershock could be felt from far away. This was definitely no ordinary spell.

"Lily!"

"I know, wait up a little!"

With just a brief command from Erica, the silver-haired friend responded immediately. Possessing a witch's disposition, her senses were more acute than typical magi, and she could sense magical presences and their flow much better than ordinary people.

Liliana surveyed the surroundings and began to search for the location of cataclysm.

"Her Eminence seems to have started, Lu Yinghua, I will fly to the appointed location."

Asherah's lips maintained a smile as she spoke.

As if jeering the great knights for their immaturity, it was a smile full of confidence and mockery. On the other hand, her companion was coldly muttering "it's finally here."

"You go and start first, I'll be there shortly."

Erica could hardly believe her hearing. Go and start first?

Lu Yinghua, highly renowned for his outstanding qinggong[68], allowing another to arrive before him? Could this girl be -- Asherah's body was surrounding by blue light, and she took off like fireworks, her continuously ascending figure flying through the air like a comet.

[Flight] magic! Erica's suspicions were correct.

The spell allowing free flight through the skies, could only be used by people possessing dispositions to be witches (or similar miko). All other practitioners of magic had to summon flying equipment and ride upon them. Even so, no other witch had that kind of speed.

"You people -- no, what is Cult Leader Luo Hao planning! Answer me, martial artist!"

Liliana questioned the remaining Lu Yinghua.

However, the young Hong Kong-born martial artist smiled with supercilious derision, ignoring the question.

"You can simply find out for yourself in a little while. Goodbye, Nee-san! If you want a fight, then wait until my master arrives!"

Lu Yinghua fled directly.

It wasn't normal running, but the magic that Liliana and Erica called [Leap], using supernatural leg strength and jumping power to run as if flying through the air, a spell for rapid mobility that rivaled the speed of wild beasts or vehicles.

"Erica, I will follow that fellow! See you later!"

As Liliana yelled out, she used [Leap] as well.

Though Erica could also use this magic, her speed and jumping ability was inferior to Liliana.

Unlike the technique of [Flight], [Leap] was classified under physical techniques and martial arts. But as a witch, Liliana was naturally born light because a witch's disposition conferred advantages over typical magic practitioners not only in flying, but also every kind of magic related to mobility.

--Yet in spite of that, she still could not catch up to Lu Yinghua.

Liliana was greatly surprised to find the figure before her growing increasingly distant.

Her prided [Leap] was what Chinese martial artists termed [Qinggong]. Lu Yinghua's outstanding qinggong allowed him to move faster and jump higher than anyone else.

Instead of the witch, he was one who had reached the limits of bodily techniques and martial arts.

"No way, Lily! Not even you can match his speed and lightness of body!"

Erica called from behind to stop the silver-haired girl.

The only way to surpass that kind of speed was [Flight], but in order to use that magic spell, it was necessary to know the destination, which made it unsuitable for pursuit.

"Investigate where magic spells have been used. As long as we identify the location of the cataclysm and head there directly, it could very well be a shortcut."

Seeing Liliana returning with dismay, Erica decided to play a little joke.

"By the way, Lily, isn't it just like I described?"

"What?"

"Just as I said earlier, charging forth without consideration, that is your true character."

"--!? Just now was because I had no idea of the other's abilities! Next time I will face my opponents with greater calm and intelligence. Someday, I will cease to be played around by an adviser like you!"

The silver-haired knight objected with her face red. Looks like her defeat did affect her spirit.

"Is that so? Well then let's create an opportunity to strike back. Lily, check out the surroundings to see what kind of magic has been used."

In response to Erica's request, Liliana closed her eyes and concentrated.

Searching for nearby traces of magic and spiritual conditions was the technique of [Magic Investigation], one from a witch's prided arsenal of investigative spells. In many areas, Liliana was actually a much more talented mage than Erica.

"-- In the north there is a shrine hidden by magic, with a very suspicious barrier. That should be the location of Saitenguu, and the large magic felt just now is also being carried out over there."

"So it is Cult Leader Luo Hao's spell after all?"

Erica concluded from Liliana's report.

"Probably a spell related to the other world, this is great magic that normally requires several tens of magi to perform. For her to do it alone... I will lead the way, follow me."

This time the two of them charged forward using [Leap].

In just a few minutes, they reached the shrine north of Futarasan Shrine.

Liliana went forth into the depths and found a small shrine, as well as the shimenawa[69] lying on the ground. The Kuhoudzuka gentleman was laid fallen on the ground.

"Just unconscious."

"Dominated by mental magic for such a long period, and continuously deprived of sleep for several days, they really went too far."

The young master of the Kuhoudzuka family was staring off into space, his eyes completely out of focus. His slightly opened lips did not speak as Liliana and Erica studied him and nodded to each other.

"This is Saitenguu without a doubt, so where is Kusanagi Godou and the others?"

"And no sign of Amakasu-san either."

Immediately afterwards, the change in the sky happened.

This was the autumn sky of the setting sun. Though it was still very bright, everything would be a shade of orange in about an hour.

In the corner of the sky -- right above Nikkou Mountain appeared a large serpent.

From the perspective of the ground, the snake's body length was roughly several tens of meters. The exceptionally long snake's body was covered with silvery-white scales. However, it lacked the usual feeling of disgust when one saw a snake, rather, there was an attractive feeling of strong and solemn beauty.

"A Heretic God... Heretic Leviathan...!"

Liliana suddenly cried out.

Was this spirit vision! Hearing the name that could not be ignored, Erica held her breath.

"Lily you said Leviathan just now, right? The name of that snake deity?"

"Yes, no mistake, I did see the divine name of the god. If Mariya Yuri was here, her spirit vision would likely see through her entire past and origin..."

When encountering a mother earth deity, a witch's powers will temporarily amplify. Dragon and snake deities also belonged to this lineage, and produced the same effect. Hearing Liliana's explanation, Erica began to ponder.

"...Half a month ago, there seemed to be a [Heretic God] that appeared at Los Angeles. From the appearance of the giant serpent described in the Witenagemot's report, it was most likely the deity Leviathan."

"The deity defeated by John Pluto Smith."

"Yes, it should have been summoned by rituals of the sorcerers of the [King of Flies]... I've heard before that their leader was the witch named Asherah."

"The witch just now was also called Asherah, and came from Los Angeles."

The silver-haired childhood friend had noticed.

"And then Leviathan has also appeared, so we can conclude it is the same person. Furthermore, I've noticed something else. Even the strongest sorcerer cannot summon a [Heretic God] alone, don't you find it suspicious?"

"Of course it is impossible, if it could be done... No, could it be -- a divine ancestor?"

Amongst magi, there were secret myths in circulation.

For example, amongst the great mother goddesses of the earth conquered by dragon-slayers like Perseus, there were those who were weakened, fallen, or driven from their divine thrones. They were the witches known as [Divine Ancestors].

Human in form, but not human.

Possessing supernatural powers surpassing humans but inferior to gods, these girls remained forever young and never succumbed to old age.

By abandoning their eternal longevity, they could regain their unruly divinity of the mother earth goddess, or in other words, revive themselves in the form of a dragon or snake god...

"Could the leader of the [King of Flies] be an authentic divine ancestor...?"

"The name Asherah, was probably derived from Athirat.[70] The sea monster Leviathan that first appeared in the Old Testament of the Bible and began circulating in other myths, was also a reference to the Mesopotamian goddess Asherah which was treated as an evil beast."

The two of them looked up at the sky once again.

Somehow, distributed all over Leviathan's body were all sorts of wounds, big and small.

Blood constantly flowed out from the wounds, and because the snake deity was hovering in the air, the blood naturally fell upon the earth.

Bright crimson blood descended like rain and mist, and was dyeing Nikkou Mountain red everywhere!

"What is going on in there...!?"

Erica worried as she watched the depths of darkness beyond the gridded door to the shrine.

Part 3

Crashing through the roof of the stable, Godou's body flew up into the sky.

Luo Hao shook the sleeves of her robe and flew in the air, chasing after the Campione she had thrown outside. This was not a metaphor, she was literally flying.

[Flight] magic that flew like a bird in the sky. This was a Daoist art[71] which was only possible for Daoist priestesses possessing a witch's disposition. Like Liliana Kranjcar, Luo Hao was someone who the Europeans would call a witch.

The strange happenings in the stable did not end there.

Yuri was terrified by the changes in her younger sister and the monkey divine monarch.

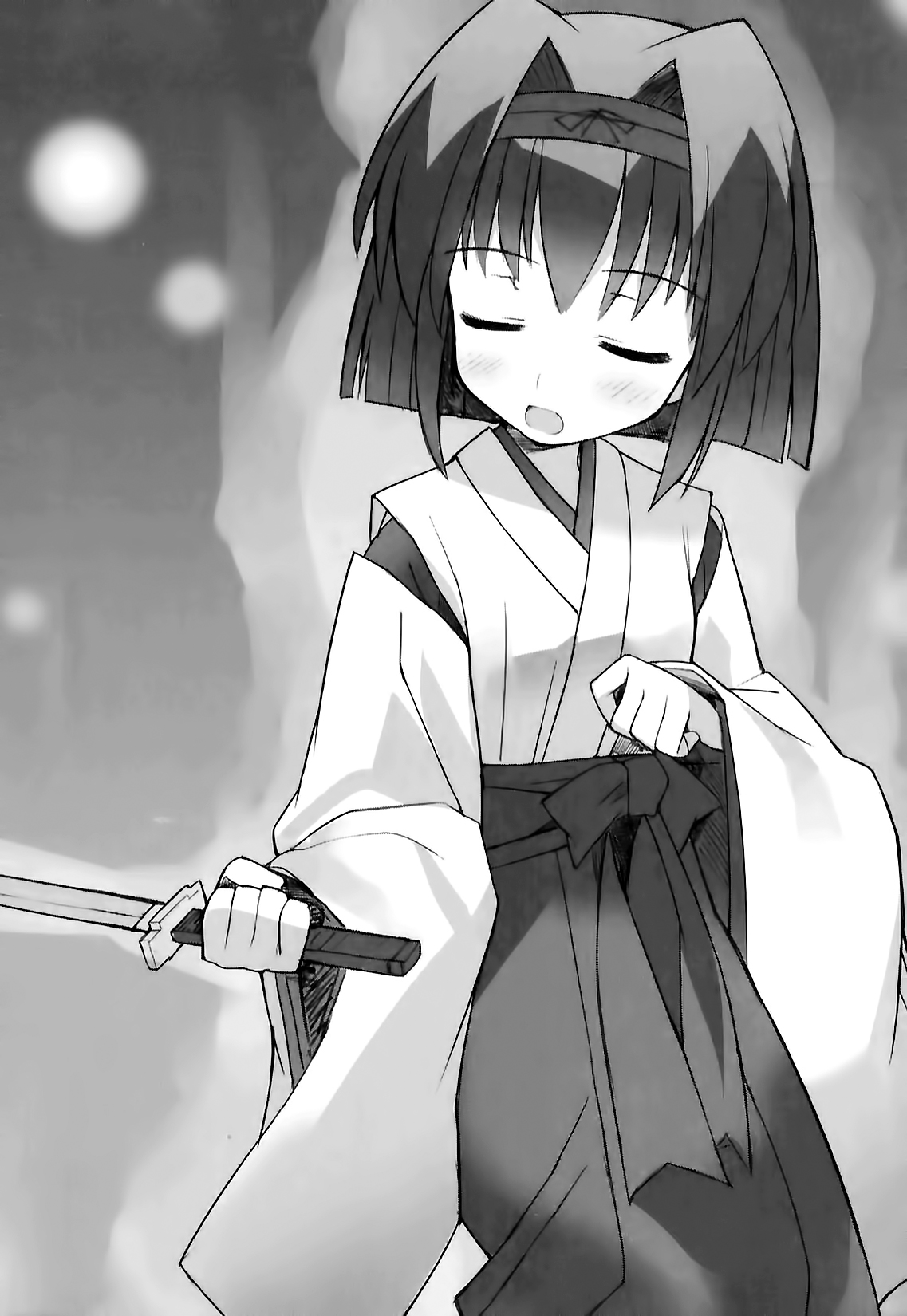
"Akashiura is hazy with in the morning mist / On the boat to the secluded island, old friends are reminisced."

Chanting the spell song, Hikari brandished the kodachi.

Slicing at the eastern position, slicing at the southern position, slicing at the western position, slicing at the northern position. Currently, the one controlling the younger sister's motions was the kodachi -- infused in Zanryuutou was some unknown spell.

"Male--yang, female--yin, their union results in conception, thus beginning pregnancy. Carried to term after ten months and born as human, yet to leave my body but already knows Hito-maru."[72]

Taking clumsy footsteps circling around the monkey divine monarch, Hikari waved the sword as she chanted.



--The entrance to the corridor that connected the real world to the Netherworld, that four-sided hole was originally just the size for a human to pass through. It had now enlarged suddenly, and even the walls of the stable had expanded as well.

Seeing the reddened sky of dusk, this was clearly the scenery on earth, the sky of the real world.

And far in the distance was something hovering, Yuri focused her gaze and saw a coiled snake -- floating in the air, with blood red mist and rain descending upon the earth!

"Hoho, that snake deity looks heavily injured."

The monkey divine monarch had turned into stone at some point in time, and was completely unable to move.

Once this stone was cracked open like the shell of an egg, the monkey divine monarch will be reborn as a [Heretic God]! Under the direction of spirit vision, Yuri believed without a doubt.

"I am a member of steel, a god born under the stars to crusade against dragons and snakes. Thus the blood and divine power of dragons and snakes shall rouse me, and act as poison that forces me to recall my violent nature. Hohoho, now that I think about it, the leisurely life of a monkey wasn't bad at all. Oh, what a shame, what a shame!"

Even after being turned into a stone monkey, the monkey divine monarch continued to speak as before, without any change in his frivolous tone.

But within that tone of voice, one could sense there was an extremely powerful feeling mixed inside.

With the entire body petrified, only the eyes kept their fleshy form. Somehow the eyes had turned red, with the white of the eyeballs now completely red in color, except for the golden colored pupils.

--Fiery eyes and golden pupils, these were the holy eyes possessed by the Chinese sacred beast.

"Divine Monarch-sama, please could you remain calm! I beg you, please!"

"I would like to, but it is impossible. I guess this is basically like being drunk... No... More like drunk in blood."

The monkey divine monarch replied to Yuri in an aloof manner.

As if unwilling to let himself be tainted by the dirt of the common world, a voice sounding like a member of some divine clan.

"Anyway, change is the only constant in this universe. Everything beyond an inch is enshrouded in darkness. That Rakshasa girl could very well betray me in a critical moment. Just in case, I should prepare beforehand."

The stone monkey's eyes gave off golden light.

"Miko, infuse your power into the treasured blade, fill it to the limit until the vessel saturates, use all the power you possess."

"The flow of blood is the father and mother's flow of blood. When the flow of blood ends, so does life, the god of the flow of blood --"

Hikari held Zanryuutou up high.

Yuri could sense her sister using spell words constantly, infusing the spirit power of disaster purification into Zanryuutou, entering the evil-vanquishing, curse-lifting, treasured blade blessed with fortune!

"--!? Please do not let this continue!"

"Hahaha, pray forgive me, but I also need to use this miko's power and body!"

It seems like even in such a state, the divine monarch was still able to use a portion of his divine power.

Though she had no idea what intentions he had with Hikari, there was no time to hesitate. It was imperative to leave here as quickly as possible! Silent, Yuri began to concentrate.

After ten-odd seconds, she very carefully rushed to her sister's body, and attempted to use [Transfer].

Instantaneous movement from one place to another, it was a method of mobility that could only be used in the Netherworld.

It was not possible to escape the barrier imprisoning the monkey divine monarch. This was already confirmed a while ago, but she could target the palace visible outside, in other words, the place where Kusanagi Godou was currently in a crisis.

Originally, the power of spirit vision could not be used freely.

But in the Netherworld, it could be freely controlled.

Connecting her consciousness to the Memories of the Void in this world, using spirit vision to capture the situation in the surroundings of the stable, and performing a transfer towards the image obtained...!

The result was a success, Yuri and Hikari's bodies began to transfer instantaneously.

Her eyes dull, the younger sister was silent, staring motionlessly in her embrace. What a relief, Yuri finally relaxed and took a deep breath, having successfully escaped.

"Ah, you're planning on escaping? Fine, my body hasn't regained its freedom yet. Do whatever you want for now, I am looking forward to the game of hide-and-seek later."

Just as they disappeared, Yuri heard the monkey god's words.

She heard the declaration of the [Heretic God] who loved playing jokes on others and causing havoc in the world.

Furthermore, Hikari's hand had lost strength and let go of Zanryuutou, leaving it behind in the stable of the stone monkey.

Part 4

After flying high through the air, obviously one would eventually fall towards the ground.

Even in a mysterious realm like the Netherworld, gravity still existed. Clearly there was no need for gravitational attraction in such a place, Godou could not stop cursing.

At his current height, he could see the full view of the city.

It was even wider than he imagined. Rather, too wide. The city was enclosed within the city walls, approximating a square with each side roughly one kilometre or so. Within the walls were all sorts of buildings, large and small.

There seemed to be three or four buildings that could be called palaces, and very likely had names like something court or whatever palace.

There were a countless number of smaller buildings, probably numbering over a hundred.

The city walls were very tall, over ten metres, and there were watch towers built on the walls.

--As he watched this magnificent cluster of buildings, Godou began to fall.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?"

This all happened within the span of a few seconds.

Returning to the surface at last, Godou had fallen onto the stone paved ground of something like plaza.

And then he had a great surprise. It didn't hurt much! He had scratches all over, but that was due to crashing through the roof.

Falling from a nightmarish height onto hard ground without any injuries, it was impossible. Besides, humans should be falling headfirst due to the distribution of weight, and Godou could not help but shiver.

A judo master could control the damage when throwing an opponent, but that was a technique that was only possible while the thrower continued to hold on to the opponent's body. Luo Hao had completely let go and directly tossed Godou into the sky.

--"The pinnacle of martial arts" was what the cult leader had said.

In other words, she was a master who could easily perform such miraculous feats that went beyond common sense!

"After all, a spar should take place in a wide open area. King Kusanagi, I hold no grudge against you. This is just a one-time minor punishment. Once you admit how foolish you are, I shall forgive you."

Cult Leader Luo Hao declared as she landed from the air.

"How am I foolish, you tell me instead! I don't have anything that requires your instruction!"

"Opposing Luo Hao's decree, if not foolish then what kind of behavior is it? Small knowledge does not reach to large knowledge , and small years do not reach to large years. The dawn-to-dusk fungus does not know the compass of a single month, the one-season cicada cannot know both spring and fall. Is that not just pitiful?"[73]

Admittedly, Godou's upbringing was inferior to hers, and being called foolish was not wrong, but there were some subtle parts that he couldn't understand.

And then, by the time Godou realized it, the transcendent beauty was already standing right in front of him.

Hmm--? When did she approach? He completely failed to react.

Luo Hao's crystal-like hand grabbed his shoulder, and flung him high into the air again, Godou felt like he was swimming in the sky once again. Then he fell, and this time it hurt more than the last.

A third grab. Thrown, swimming, falling, the more powerful impact than the last made him feel out of breath.

The fourth time. The same action was repeated again, and the pain in his back increased. This time, the back of his head was also hit.

As the injuries gradually piled up on his body, Godou realized she had complete control! Terrified, Godou was certain he would really be in trouble if he doesn't escape from this endless cycle.

While being thrown, he also noticed something --

Godou activated Verethragna's authority -- the [Bull] form, the special ability which granted mighty strength when facing opponents with monstrous strength.

Luo Hao caught him for the fifth time.

Lowering his stance, he stepped hard against the ground. In order to prevent himself from being thrown, Godou released his mighty strength.

"Oh... Hohoho, looks like you have a bit of a backbone."

The cult leader showed a gorgeous smile. Her icy cool beauty remained the same, but once she began to rampage, a certain sense of charm appeared in her demeanor.

What was with this person, Godou was speechless as he tried hard to struggle free.

Godou became aware the [Bull] could be used when he was being thrown. Cult Leader Luo Hao had used uncommonly monstrous strength to fling Godou into the sky, and made use of spectacular martial arts to skillfully control the damage.

Realizing that was why Godou decided to resist.

Now he knew for certain, the cult leader's crystal-like hand that grabbed him by the chest, possessed exceptionally frightening power.

Only the [Bull]'s strength had the power to resist her, and avoid being thrown.

The battle of monstrous strength. Resists. Incredibly, Godou was able to block her throwing technique.

But in the next instant, he was swept to the ground by her leg.

The landing impacted his back and the back of his head, but at least he didn't fly an outrageous distance. The attack just now was probably pure technique.

"On further thought, you are one of the god-slayers... Having a corresponding ability is only to be expected."

"You're out of control! That monstrous strength must be your authority!"

Godou believed so.

The enormous strength inconsistent with the slender beautiful girl. But whenever he tried to ponder her true identity, his head began to hurt.

Just like the time when obtained knowledge about Susanoo, it was the process of spirit vision, but it would be impossible to fight with that kind of intense headache, so Godou decided to stop thinking about it.

"Correct, this is the authority [Divine Might of Vajrapani][74] that I usurped from the Om[75] pair of Benevolent Kings[76]... Martial arts can make the powerless strong, but when mighty strength is paired with peerless martial technique, the results are extraordinary. Now I shall show you what is meant by the martial pinnacle."

"Martial arts master plus a monster's strength? Becoming very powerful is normal! That's cheating!"

Ignoring Godou's protests, a large amount of magical power flowed out from Cult Leader Luo Hao's body.

What powerful and densely concentrated magical power.

Could the output of monstrous strength be in direct proportion to the magical power released? Godou was watching the current scene and speculating as if he was reading a shounen manga.

"The way of the heavens is bright and clear, the way of the earth is untroubled and tranquil, the way of mankind is empty and serene! --Ho!"

Roaring with an intensely imposing manner, Luo Hao took a step forward.

In the vast plaza the two were standing on, cracks started to appear on the floor radiating from the spot where she stepped. The stone paved plaza was virtually smashed.

Just from a single step!

Of course, the paving stones beneath Godou also shattered. This was a situation like a dream or a joke.

"W-Wait a minute! I have a question for you! Have you met Salvatore Doni!? Compared to that guy, who is more amazing? In the areas of swordsmanship and martial arts."

"Salvatore...? Now that you mention it, there is a [King] with that name."

Hearing Godou's question, Luo Hao replied politely.

Even when faced with Verethragna's authority, she was not pressured to go all out. This was obvious, anyone could see that Cult Leader Luo Hao was a million times stronger than Kusanagi Godou.

"I encountered him a year ago. In terms of skill with the sword, his technique approaches mine, but his other martial arts completely failed to match me, I should describe him as totally immature."

To label as immature the heretical genius swordsman who was admired and feared by the knights of Europe.

Ah, this kind of answer was expected, Godou sadly agreed.

In battle, a Campione can muster exceptional concentration, and thanks to that, Godou's dynamic vision could even capture clearly the fastballs from major league baseball.

He could even feel the moving presence of Salvatore Doni's sword.

However, Cult Leader Luo Hao's attacks gave off no presence at all. This was probably the skill of a master, and not within the realm of Godou's understanding, rather, it should be a very advanced mystic technique of martial arts...!

What to do? Which incarnation should be used now?

If possible, Godou wanted to use the [Camel], but would he be able to survive one direct hit from that monstrous strength?

How about the [Raptor] -- no, this one definitely cannot be used . If Salvatore Doni had once defeated this incarnation, then there is no way it could be effective against Cult Leader Luo Hao.

...No other way, Godou made his decision.

He should not seek victory through a confrontation against an opponent skilled in direct combat or exchanging blows, because it would be quite dangerous and pointless in terms of tactics. After becoming a Campione, this was something he learned from experience.

Be prepared to fight and make as much of a ruckus as possible.

When using Verethragna's second form, the power of the [Bull], the target of monstrous strength was very important. If well used, it was a power that could turn a majestic church in Naples into ruins.

The power of the earth flowed into Godou's body through this feet.

This time, the target was -- Kusanagi Godou's body!

"Heyaaaaaaaah!!"

Godou roared meaninglessly as he took action, jumping with all his strength.

Like doing track and field or physical tests, he used the principles of the long jump to vault over Luo Hao's head, landing ten-odd metres away.

The [Bull]'s monstrous strength adjusts itself depending on the target. Against a four-ton truck, one could lift it with two arms. On the other hand, used against the seventy kilograms of Kusanagi Godou, the effect was small but still noticeable.

From the perspective of the [Bull], the benefit was very small.

But for the purpose of escaping from Luo Hao right before her eyes, it was sufficient.

"--Hmm!?"

The beautiful brows frowned as the cult leader turned to look back.

At this time, Godou took the next step. Run, just ignore everything and run. His destination was the luxurious palace, but the walls of the palace garden blocked his path.

Roughly five metres in height. His destination was just ahead -- Godou held onto the wall with both hands.

Using the [Bull]'s monstrous strength on the entire wall, causing it to make a shaking sound, and then pushing hard. The mighty power of the great earth filled Godou's body.

"Ooooooooooh!"

Yelling from the depths of his throat.

At the same time, Godou collapsed the standing wall with his two arms.

"--Oh!? What powerful arm strength... King Kusanagi!"

Luo Hao's praise could be heard from behind.

It seemed like every time he displayed his strength, her approval of him increased... Could Cult Leader Luo Hao have some sort of muscle fetish?

As he pondered this kind of stupid question, Godou continued to run.

He took a quick glance behind.

Smiling with satisfaction, the cult leader was following with leisurely footsteps.

She clearly did not see Kusanagi Godou as a threat, but having noticed her opponent possessed some ability, she casually pursued . Very good, if that's the case, Godou still had enough strength in reserve to reach his destination.

Thanking Luo Hao with behavior like a Sumo Yokozuna[77], Godou finally entered the interior of the palace.

The next step was to find a wide open space and wait quietly, then he was set.

A few minutes later, Cult Leader Luo Hao had arrived. The shoes worn on her dainty feet made no sound at all, and like a gentle breeze blowing through the trees, the beauty was approaching.

Godou was speechless, she arrived much earlier than expected.

This palace should be quite large, but he didn't expect to be found by her in such short time.

Did she use magic to determine Godou's location, or was it the senses of a martial artist? Regardless, she was someone that could not be judged by common sense.

"King Kusanagi, are you planning some kind of trap?"

Luo Hao was looking down from high above, while Godou looked out from afar.

"The glimmer in your eyes already betray your intentions. I, Luo Hao, will neither flee nor hide, be my guest and try out your secret plan!"

"I understand, then I'll be making my move now?"

"Of course, how could a martial arts master like me be defeated by a young junior, that is absolutely impossible. This is simply martial arts common sense, you are welcome."

Luo Hao casually issued her order, and Godou accepted with great gratitude.

If she wanted to go easy on him, then he might as well go with the flow. When an overwhelmingly strong opponent offers an advantage, there was no need to stick to principles of fair competition.

Godou switched to another incarnation, the [Boar], and the ground beneath his feet turned black.

This black color immediately turned into pitch black fur and hide.

Solidly built in appearance, giant and strongly majestic, the narcissistic [Boar] had arrived!

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice"

With the roar of the spell words the divine beast was roused.

The ground he was stepping had become the [Boar]'s back, and Godou clung onto the black fur with all his might. Now that preparations were complete, go all out with the attack!

Oooooooooh!

As the palace was filed with the roars of the [Boar], the divine beast broke through the ground beneath the giant chamber, and its body slowly emerged.

The incarnation that can only be used for destroying massive objects, Godou picked the palace as the target. After all, it wasn't a building in human society, smashing it to dust was not a problem.

"This time you'd better follow my orders properly!"

Ooooooooh!

A very daunting answer(?), did it actually understand?

"Summoning an avatar? It looks like your authority is not limited to mighty strength."

Seeing the grand and solidly built massive body of the [Boar], Luo Hao commented elegantly.

Apparently she did not feel threatened.

As befitting a Campione, her senses were not normal. Fine, whatever. After all in such a situation, the point of summoning this fellow was to avoid a direct showdown against her.

Oooooooooooooh!!

The [Boar] and its roars began to get to work, crushing the floor, smashing columns, and beginning to charge.

After tens of seconds, the black divine beast demolished the palace as it charged outside.

Leaving Cult Leader Luo Hao within the collapsed building.

...Hopefully she didn't die. Observing the disaster zone, Godou thought to himself. Though he was the one being targeted, he still felt some guilt.

After all, she was a Campione and definitely would find a way to survive. Godou had total confidence in the immortality of deities and his fellow peers.

(Actually, Godou was unaware that this was a mentality he had unwittingly picked up through his various battles over the past few months.)

Having reached the outside, the [Boar] still did not stop taking action.

The destruction was not enough, so it began to charge at the destroyed palace, demolishing walls, breaking beams and pillars, soon transforming the ruins of the palace into a complete wasteland.

"Y-You idiot! At least make sure I don't fall off!"

Godou was yelling on the back of his unruly companion(?), and almost bit his own tongue. Next time he should be more careful. Grabbing the black fur with all his strength and lying on the body of the boar, he was working hard not to fall off.

This was a life-gambling rodeo show, but at least it prevented a direct battle against Cult Leader Luo Hao.

And he was still safe. A desperate plan of action because he deemed a direct battle too disadvantageous. In that case, just flip the proverbial table and destroy the battlefield completely.

--Speaking of the [Boar], this guy unexpectedly turned out to be compulsively obsessive about cleanliness. The fur was soft and smooth as if washed with hair conditioner, and there was no unpleasant odor usual of wild beasts.

Having confirmed the habits of the black [Boar], Godou began to ponder.

For now he escaped the challenge of Cult Leader Luo Hao, but things have not ended. He must hurry and meet up with Yuri and Hikari to get out as soon as possible.

...Suddenly, the [Boar]'s movements stopped, was it time already?"

Godou took a deep breath, and surveyed the pitiful state of the ruins from behind the divine beast's back.

Luo Hao was buried within the remains of the palace, but the overall shape was still there. The [Boar] should have continued wreaking destruction, but the fearsome divine beast was not moving.

It was screaming at the rubble before its eyes, its ferocious teeth and snout aiming in that direction. As if preparing for a charge, its rear heels were kicking against the ground audibly.

There was basically only one possible existence that could prevent this guy from beginning its task.

That's right, things couldn't have ended so easily.

If it was Salvatore Doni, then he could withstand that level of collapse using his steel body, and then cut open the mountain of debris with his crazy magic sword and escape. Voban would probably survive by transforming into that giant wolf.

Thus Cult Leader Luo Hao's escape from her predicament was only expected -- !

Though Godou was certain Luo Hao had broken free, he was still completely shocked by the following developments, for he never expected her to employ such a method.

"Hah -- !"

Luo Hao's beautiful voice was heard.

The building materials of the palace ruins were being blown into the sky piece by piece.

The one performing this task, was a rapidly spinning beauty. Maintaining a stance with both arms outstretched, the cult leader was spinning like a top! Not only that, this human top was sending the debris flying as it hovered in the air!

Impossible! Godou stared in shock and was rendered speechless .

An authority of monstrous strength, the flying magic witnessed in the sky just now, and a physical technique that allowed high speed spinning like a top.

How did all this combine into such a strong body, that doesn't even lose to the hardness of timber and stone, this kind of technique should not exist!

Completely different from the escape scenarios Godou considered, the sight before him totally exceeded common sense.

Cult Leader Luo Hao was floating in the air as if hung by a stunt wire? Unbelievable.

"King Kusanagi, I really have to praise you well! There are few in the world who can soil with dust the clothes of I, Luo Hao. You have achieved it -- hohoho, just like that Salvatore whatever, and the stubborn one from England. For there to be three devil kings able to accomplish this monumental feat within the past decade... As a senior along the path of domination, I am most pleased!"

Stopping her spinning and hovering, the cult leader praised Godou as she landed upon the ruins.

That's right, her white Han clothing was soiled with dust, but her slender body was virtually unharmed, and not even her hair was messed up.

And using some kind of magic, her clothes instantly transformed. It was a robe reminiscent of the ladylike attire of enlightened female immortals[78], a luxurious outfit similar to a mandarin gown.[79] Though the opening at the chest offered a view of her jade-like skin, thoughts of desire did not enter Godou's mind.

She was preparing to make her move, so she changed into more mobile clothes!

"...I was originally planning on give you a three-move advantage."

Smiling was the one named Cuilian with style name Hao.

Innocently adorable, a very wonderful smile of a maiden. But as the thought of the extremely twisted personality of this stubborn person emerged turbulently in Godou's mind, staring at that facial expression like a blooming flower made him feel like vomiting.

-- To be honest, he was certain even without proof.

That innocent and adorable look was evidence that the cult leader was getting serious. No mistake about it!

A Campione's sixth sense could feel danger, Godou was absolutely sure of that.

"But I am not going to go easy any more, if I let you have two more moves, I might very well end up in defeat. So as your senior, I can only grant you the free move just now... Starting now, Luo Hao will go all out and show you the perils of martial arts."

These words said in such an adorable, cautious and ladylike manner.

Compared to the condescending tones before, the current Luo Hao was even more terrifying.

"You have already witnessed my authority [Divine Might of Vajrapani]. Now I shall demonstrate the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl]. Thanks to these two grand techniques, I have become the Ruler of the Martial Realm."

Cult Leader Luo Hao took a deep breath, and expelled it together with her beautiful voice.

"Last year we fought where the Sang-kan flows / This year it was Onion River Road. We’ve washed our swords in the Eastern

Sea / Grazed our horses on Tian Shan's snowy side. A thousand miles are not enough for this war / Our armies grow old in their armor."[80]

It was a beautiful singing voice. However, everything in the cult leader's surroundings were blown away entirely.

Debris, remains of the building, as well as intact palace walls and slabs of stone were blown away by the strong wind. Her song had turned into magical wind that obliterated everything in its path.

"Husbandmen of slaughter, the Huns / Have sown the yellow desert with our bones. Long ago the Qin built the Great Wall / Now it’s the Han who light the signal beacon. All night long the flames flicker / Year in year out, the war lingers."

Singing with great passion, the magical wind grew ever stronger, blowing things further and further away.

There was nothing left in Cult Leader Luo Hao's vicinity, save for the gigantic [Boar].

No! She can't be allowed to sing any longer!

In the instant that realization struck Godou, the [Boar] charged at the cult leader.

"Bright swords flash, brave men fall and die / Riderless horses whinny at the sky. Kites and crows pluck out the guts / Hang them high on the withered trees."

The heavy pressure of the magical wind changed.

The smooth ballad was like a lullaby to the [Boar]'s ears, and pressured by the wind fluctuation, the black divine beast halted in its steps. Luo Hao had suppressed the charge.

To think that someone other than Perseus who possessed Mithra's light could subdue the [Boar] that never yielded to any other deity!

"Soldiers' blood on the dry grass stained / While generals map the next campaign. Wise men know a war having won / Is no better than losing one."

The heavy wind pressure became a shockwave.

The [Boar]'s solidly built and giant body floated upwards for an instant, and then the follow up shockwave sent the off-balance divine beast flying off its feet.

"Waaaaaaaah!"

Godou lost his balance on the beast's back, and fell towards the ground.

Though he had hit the ground a number of times just now, this time it was not one of Luo Hao's merciful throws. Fearing for his life if he hit the ground directly like that, Godou struggled to grab the black fur, and just barely made it.

The moment of crisis was averted for now, but the divine beast was lying fallen on the ground, so falling off was just a matter of time.

Using the [Boar]'s fur, Godou jumped and descended back onto the ground.

Back on that nostalgic ground surface, Godou noticed. Luo Hao had stopped singing!?

During this opening, the [Boar] started to get up.

Oooooooooh!

Entering a battle state, the divine beast roared, but the serious Cult Leader Luo Hao was just beginning to show her true skills.

"Glowing sun, brilliance of scorching lightning! Spirit of the heavens, spirit of the earth, Grand Supreme Elderly Lord[81], make haste as commanded!"

She leisurely approached the giant pitch black body as she chanted the spell words.

It wasn't magic but the use of her authority. As a Campione, Godou could tell, but which one was she going to use? The monstrous strength, or the song of the shockwave?

...Most likely the former, but Godou could not have expected the manner it would proceed in.

As magical power in Luo Hao's body continued to rise, it gave off a wavering image like a desert mirage.

The [Boar] on the side, was struck by this illusionary body.

Oooooooooh!

Unbelievably, she made the [Boar] cry, like a hurt little puppy running around in pain.

And then once again, the boar was hit. Was that succinct motion what they called a middle punch in karate?

The [Boar] roared once again. There was an effect, it received damage! Watching the illusion before his eyes, Godou was rendered speechless.

This wavering illusion like a desert mirage, gradually took on a clear form --

Transforming into a half-naked muscular giant.

A very cleanly shaven head, solemn expression, giant bulging muscular body, the lower half was clad in rough clothes, while the entire body shone with golden light!

Godou had seen this appearance in photographs.

The Buddha Guardians at the southern gates of Toudai-ji[82]! Come to think of it, Luo Hao did mention it.

Her monstrous strength authority was usurped from an Om pair of Benevolent Kings. Benevolent Kings are basically Buddha Guardians!

"The swimming dragon rushes to the heavens, attack from close quarters, close in rapidly from the eight directions, spinning double kick!"

As if teaching unarmed martial arts, Luo Hao was rapidly reciting mantras.

In coordination, the Buddha Guardian that appeared before her also moved rapidly in response.

An upper cut, at the same time stepping and kneeing, followed by a series of short punches, knee strike, middle punch, and then a spinning aerial kick, a two-hit combo without touching the ground !

As swift and fluent as a fight scene from a kungfu movie. The one being hit was of course the [Boar].

Oooooooooh! Oooooooooh! Oooooooooh!

The divine beast's roars were akin to weeping cries.

"That guy always sounded so dauntless when rampaging and showing off, but I never knew it sucked so much at taking hits..."

Godou watched in shock, as the Buddha Guardian raised the giant body of the [Boar] up high.

On one hand. What terrifying strength.

Directly sending it into the sky, it was Luo Hao's throwing skill that Godou already tasted many times.

So this Buddha Guardian could actually use the Luo Hao's martial arts...!?

Godou's fears were confirmed, as the [Boar] fell with a resounding crash and ground tremor, the giant body of the black divine beast disappeared like a puff of smoke.

"-- Now that your avatar has vanished, King Kusanagi, your person follows next."

Luo Hao's intelligent pupils locked on to Godou.

Finally realizing the state of emergency, Godou couldn't help but swallow hard...

"G-Godou-san! Are you fine!?"

The adorable Hime-Miko was yelling with all her strength.

From Godou's side, Mariya suddenly appeared, carrying Hikari whose eyes looked empty. This was likely the mobility method called transfer.

"Mariya! What happened to Hikari? Is she OK!?"

"A-After using the ritual of the treasured sword, the monkey divine monarch used divine power on her... Though she is still conscious, she is in a dazzled state and unable to converse, I... I believed it was dangerous to continue staying in the stable, so I used spirit vision to find Godou-san's location and transferred here ...!"

This report shocked Godou, for he had completely forgotten about the monkey divine monarch. Furthermore, their most pressing concern now was the demonic cult leader whose slender and elegant brows were now frowning at the sudden intruders.

"...To enter the battlefield between two devil kings, what impudent miko."

Coordinating with her complaint, the giant Buddha Guardian raised his fist.

Faced with challenge after challenge, Godou stepped in front to protect Yuri, whose face had turned pale, behind his back, and yelled:

"Wait a minute! Are you planning to attack Mariya and me together!?"

"If the frail little girl intruded into our duel, she must be prepared to sacrifice herself and die together with her lord. Then I, Luo Hao, must respect her act of loyalty. King Kusanagi, if you don't wish for the girl to die in battle, defeat my special move!"

This woman was entirely incomprehensible! Watching the fist in the sky, Godou clutched his head in his arms.

In actual fact, that would be the same punching impact as Luo Hao. If Godou cannot evade it, his outcome would be the same as the battle just now. What could he do? Sit there and die?

"Also, I must make myself clear to the miko. Even if you wish to transfer your lord, it will be useless because it requires prior preparation along with a clear and serene spirit. There is no time for you to transfer now and you will be killed before you can escape."

Due to Yuri's appearance, Luo Hao reminded solemnly.

Godou could clearly feel the breathing of the Hime-Miko behind him pause because her thoughts were read.

I see, if there was more time to prepare then transfer could be used to escape. Seeing the moving golden fist, Godou clenched his teeth in reluctance. Was it too late? --No!

At this rate, he was going to die and the Mariya sisters behind his back will also die; they will definitely die.

In the instant that the fist descended like lightning, thoughts rushed through Godou's mind like spinning revolving door.

He had to put up some final resistance. He cannot die here for such a silly reason and he definitely could not let Yuri and Hikari die along with him. How could he permit such things to occur!

The fist must be blocked somehow. Should he use the [Raptor] after all? But Salvatore Doni was able to defeat it in the past. Will it be any use against Luo Hao? His right arm felt scorching hot, as if burning up. Where could he escape? How should he defend? Fight ? When did his arm begin to get hot? No, let's put these questions aside, and consider how to escape certain death before them. Flee as much as possible with the [Raptor] --

Time's up. Mariya Yuri at this time still continued to hold the mesmerized Hikari in her arms, and the Buddha Guardian's fist was coming down fast. It was the instant Godou attempted his last struggle.

His right arm hurt greatly, and for some reason, the thoughts of the lustre of steel and the flash of the sword entered his mind.

In the next instant, Godou and the Mariya sisters' bodies vanished like the clouds of dawn.

"They escaped? That was undoubtedly the technique of transfer just now... But they are no longer within the city."

Luo Cuilian puzzled over the unexpected result.

Before the punch of the open-mouthed[83] Benevolent King she summoned could connect, King Kusanagi and the miko had vanished.

That was the technique of transfer used for journeying within the Youmingjie (the Japanese called it the Netherworld), but there were two problems. First of all, this city was within a barrier, and furthermore, that technique could not be used without time to concentrate.

Using investigative Daoist arts, Luo Hao confirmed they were not within the city and could not be located. King Kusanagi had somehow broken the barrier and transferred to the outside.

Or perhaps he possessed a treasure that could be used during such a time?

"That youth has great potential... To finish him off immediately would be too hasty. Let me give him some respite for now."

'Hoho, you love to cause a ruckus too.'

What suddenly sounded was the voice of her old enemy the monkey king.

With just a voice, it meant that he still had not fully awakened.

'I too, would like to hurry back to the real world for a duel -- but let's wait a while. Breaking past the spell of the [Keeper of the Horses] needs a bit of time.'

With things settled on this side, Luo Cuilian began to consider the situation on earth.

And she was very concerned about the conditions of the real world, for she'd better watch her disciples lest they slack off.

"I know, I shall return to the real world first, and await the time for us to duel again."

'Ah, I will surely satisfy your anticipation. Just wait for me to get there with your eyes peeled. God-slayer!'

Giggling with laughter, the monkey king's voice was filled with pomposity.

The Ruler of the Martial Realm had demonstrated her might. Restoring the heretical monkey through the sacred snake's sacrifice , no one could have predicted what kind of pandemonium this unfolding scene would unleash.

Chapter 6 - Outcome of the Chaotic Battle

Part 1

The stone monkey in the Netherworld stable was waiting to be revived.

Currently his name was still the monkey divine monarch, with the position "Keeper of the Horses."

His true mighty name that once shook the world had yet to be restored, but a fair proportion of his divine power had recovered, and his body above the chest had returned to flesh. The monkey god will once again be reborn from a stone monkey.

His arms had also recovered from petrification. In that case—

Moving his left hand, he placed it on his right shoulder. No problems at all.

Casually plucking a few strands of golden fur, he threw them in the air.

The ten-odd strands of fur transformed, turning into ten-odd tiny monkeys.

Even though they were weak little fellows, it was sufficient for them to play the role of "it" in a game of tag. They were immediately sent to pursue the escaped miko, and the tiny monkeys were all released from the stable to the outside.

The target miko had been taken outside the barrier by the god-slayer.

But the monkey hasn't been taking the post of the [Keeper of the Horses] in vain. He knew one or two small paths to get out of the city from inside.

If he used these small paths personally, he would be caught by the binding spell of the [Keeper of the Horses].

However, as divine messengers the little monkeys did not have that problem. Just like small fish slipping through a large net intended for a large fish, the god-sealing spell could not stop divine beasts or messengers.

"...Oh my, who is watching me from afar?"

The stone monkey noticed signs of being peeked at. In order to let the other party hear, he deliberately said it very loud.

"It's been so long since someone peeked at me, you fellows cannot get in my way, right? Just suck your thumbs and wait patiently. What? I'm not so small-minded as to go seeking trouble from you in revenge. As long as you don't do anything strange, I will leave you all alone!"

He spoke happily as he smiled.

To those who used him in the past and sealed him with the spell of the [Keeper of the Horses].

Seishuuin Ena's sudden visit, happened on the afternoon of this day.

"I say, Ena, do you really understand your situation?"

"Of course I do, that's why I came here, Kaoru. Please, could you release Ena from house arrest?"

The location was the Sayanomiya residence in Area 3 of Tokyo's special ward of Chiyoda.

It was a conversation in the study.

"...Knowing you are under house arrest, and yet you went out so openly."

Ena refuted Sayanomiya Kaoru's reproach.

"Ena did not walk out openly, but left home sneakily. Along the way, I even made sure there were no ninjas on my trail."

After the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi incident, the premier Hime-Miko had been staying home all this time. Her long black hair was extremely soft and smooth today, and even though she clearly didn't need to go to class, she still wore her student uniform. Most likely because she was too lazy to pick her clothes.

Also, Ena's home, the Seishuuin ancestral home, was located at Chichibu in Saitama prefecture.

"Begging someone on the phone is too rude, so Ena came here to negotiate directly."

"That's very much your style, I should say... Is that the only reason?"

"Let me think... Also it'd be nice to have a walk? You see, being cooped alone at home is really boring."

"It is your own doing that caused you to be confined, come on, it's your own responsibility."

Normally watching all sorts of developments with amusement, it was rare for Kaoru to speak so seriously unlike her usual self.

The unprecedented premier Hime-Miko acted extremely rashly on occasion. In these cases, it was the organization leader's responsibility to warn her seriously.

To the cheerful and sociable Kaoru, this was not a pleasant job.

"I should tell the Seishuuin family so that they will be more alert ."

"If Ena had the intention, you cannot catch me without sending people on the caliber of Amakasu or Shuto masters. Kaoru, let's not talk about this for now, and go back to the topic just now!"

"No, though I am very impressed with your prison break skills, I must deny your request."

Kaoru replied coldly.

As a side note, Shuto was short for Shuto Ancient Style, the name of the martial arts practiced by Hime-Miko and members of the History Compilation Committee. Her master was also a sword fighting instructor.

"Could you please find a way to handle this here. It's about time for Ena to show up at Kusanagi's place. My grandmother back home also said, hurry and get intimate with His Majesty, and bear his child."

"Yes, how easy going to say such words to her granddaughter, true to the name of heroine."

The elderly heroine was the head of the Seishuuin. This kind of granddaughter was only made possible by the existence of such a grandmother. Kaoru truly understood now.

"Which is why I said, this sort of method of pursuit should be withheld for now? Considering Kusanagi's character, it is for the best."

"Uh, is that so? Doesn't His Majesty like girls a lot?"

"As long as they are not homosexuals, the vast majority of youths in that age are basically like him. But due to the influence of his family environment, his attitude towards male-female relationships is overly serious, so he would feel more relaxed going out to have fun with male friends."

Calling herself the "lover" of Kusanagi Godou, Erica Blandelli was the one representing the Milanese magic association Copper

Black Cross. This news had spread far and wide within related circles, because it all started from the women attracted to him.

In the beginning, the History Compilation Committee also viewed Kusanagi Godou in such a light, but Kaoru and Amakasu revised their perspective because Godou was not as lustful as rumored.

"Except for us, it is very easy for others to get the wrong impression, so I haven't recklessly tried to correct it or prevent others from misunderstanding him... Still, his own behavior is also a major reason behind this type of misunderstanding."

The last clarification made Ena nod with satisfaction.

"Kusanagi is very manly. Yes yes, that is Ena's husband."

"For a man of his type, you can't be too hasty, it is better to conquer him slowly. First start from friends and gradually make him lower his guard, then cross the finish line in one fell swoop."

"If that's the case, wouldn't Erica take the lead? That person is very proactive."

"Ena, how can you be so inflexible here, what does it matter if she gets there first?"

Kaoru smiled cheerfully.

The playboy who targeted the same gender, bore a faint smile of pride.

"Reality is not like those love simulation games that Amakasu likes, eh? It's not a world where you can build a wonderful loving family and give birth to eternal love within the span of one or two months. Even if someone gets there before you, it is fine if you take it back for yourself. Even if marriage is an obstacle, there is always the solution of divorce."

"Wow, I don't really understand the first half, but the second half really fits Kaoru's style, how devious!"

"Hahaha, don't praise me like that... So, it's it time to talk about the punishment for sneaking out of house arrest?"

"Kaoru is the devil! Demon! Two-faced!"

Ena yelled out in protest.

Suddenly, her expression changed.

Hearing the ephemeral voices of certain gods, she showed an extremely serious expression. Ena listened quietly as she stared at the ceiling of the study. Having known the premier Hime-Miko for so long, Kaoru also noticed and realized something had occurred, and so she only watched quietly.

"Hey hey... What is going on? How rare for you to take the initiative to call from that side."

Ena took out her cellphone and placed it against her ear and mouth.

She began to chat with this powered-off cellphone. Just by listening to the conversation—no, communication—Kaoru basically understood what had happened. This was one of the strong points of the observant and acutely wise Hime-Miko who cross-dressed.

After hearing Ena's report after the communication, things were even more clear to her.

Kaoru took out her cellphone, and called the trusted subordinate whose name was mentioned just now.

"Hello, Amakasu-san. How does it feel to be on a business trip to Nikkou? Actually, I was wondering if a troublesome situation has arose, so I called you."

'If that's the case, please tell me the secret to your clairvoyance.'

Admitting to the unexpected situation, Amakasu replied.

'I was just about to call you and report, it is total chaos out here.'

Listening to her subordinate's brief report for close to ten minutes, Sayanomiya Kaoru received news of the cataclysm at Nikkou. Having finished, she sighed.

"It's true after all, Kusanagi-san has disappeared."

'"After all" are not words I can ignore, did your clairvoyance see that too?'

This time, after hearing Kaoru's explanation, Amakasu went ' hahaha, that is really...' and responded with a frivolous smile.

"Because of that, there is no need to worry about safety over there for now. I was wondering about the mastermind behind this commotion. Amakasu-san, what's your opinion?"

'I just happened to have identified a suspect, and started surveillance. However...'

"Is there a problem?"

'If the photo from my information is correct, that person should be the young master of Hong Kong's Lu family.'

Hearing her subordinate sigh casually, Kaoru could only shrug.

"If so, then that esteemed one from China must be the true suspect."

'Yes, no one would expect her if deducing without proof. But if it really is that one, then things are really bad. I will continue investigating covertly, and try to come up with a plan for the snake deity.'

"Go find Erica-san and Liliana-san first. Handle this incident well, I give you full authority."

'Understood, I will try my meager best.'

"No no, in situations like this, you have to bet your life on it to accomplish the mission, just like a ninja."

'No can do. Applying for work injury benefits requires too much red tape, and the compensation for dying on the job isn't particularly generous. Safety comes first.'

Once Kaoru finished her call, Ena spoke to her:

"Kaoru-san~~ Please, let Ena go to Nikkou, I will definitely be useful there."

The premier Hime-Miko had excellent hearing, and was listening to Amakasu's voice clearly.

Kaoru shook her head decisively.

"No, denied, although I can temporarily release your house arrest, but you must obediently stay by my side."

"Why!? If I go as reinforcements, I will definitely be able to assist His Majesty!"

"You are part of reserves in case of emergencies. I have to carefully judge the right timing for your participation."

Even after losing Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, Ena was still a divine messenger.

For example, by summoning her guardian deity Susanoo's power, she could control storms which no other wizard can control , and wreak incomparably deadly destruction. Though it was not enough to fight a real god, this level of combat ability was strong enough to handle the likes of divine servants, and thus it was imperative not to waste her on unnecessary battles.

"When your divine summoning power is truly needed, I will send you over."

"Then why don't I go to the scene first for standby! Ena will go there directly and cheer for His Majesty!"

"Of course we will go over to the vicinity of Nikkou in preparation, but we will not go to the scene immediately. When a [Heretic God] first appears and the nature of the disaster is unknown, one must calmly observe and assess the situation."

Kaoru calmly warned Ena, and then made staffing arrangements to send over there. Who knew if earthquakes or floods would occur.

Even without these destructive phenomenon, contact could very well be lost. At this time, caution was the most important.

"On the other hand, once this incident is resolved, your house arrest ends. So Ena, first come with me and observe how things develop."

Calmly giving orders, one must never be anxious in a chaotic situation. Well, she didn't have the ability to use the Hime-Miko of the Sword as a trump card either. So, how could this unfavorable situation be reversed—

Part 2

Erica and Liliana were now within the territory of Saitenguu.

A few minutes after Leviathan began bleeding, Amakasu Touma had also arrived in full composure.

"Ladies, it's only been a short separation, but you two are beautiful as ever."

"How unlike your usual speech, is there some bad news you want to discuss with us?"

The young man was calm as usual, and Erica smiled elegantly at him. One could not expect any good news when the special agent talented in ancient Japanese espionage arts made an appearance at times like this.

"Don't talk like I always bring bad news, instead let's say we are on the same boat now."

"Ah? I have never treated Amakasu-san as an enemy though?"

"Hahaha, is that so—Putting that aside, I have something to report. Right now that youth called Lu Yinghua is on standby at the Okusha inner shrine of Toushouguu, as if waiting for someone. Perhaps you may not know, this shrine right here is what you call the door to the Netherworld, and the warlord of [Steel] is sealed there."

Said in one breath, Erica could only smile wryly in response.

Amakasu had hit all the crucial points, one must never be careless around this man, but it could also be said that he was dependable in emergencies like this.

"Amakasu Touma, is it really fine for you to share such important information with us?"

Liliana gave a slight warning, and Erica signaled with her eyes.

"Let's not keep secrets between us as much as possible, and solve the matter together."

"So I see. In addition, I have obtained news of Kusanagi-san's position from my boss. With this info, there will be lots of advantages to our working together."

Amakasu told the most crucial news to them again. Having heard the content, Erica murmured softly:

"We haven't even parted for two hours, and he already flew to that kind of place. Should my beloved be described as surprising or dependable..."

"In other words, for some completely unknown reason, he went to that kind of place."

Liliana showed a subtle expression. Kusanagi Godou not only went to the Astral Plane but also that particular place. Once again, Erica bore witness to his surprisingly frightening ability to stay alive.

"So, we will take the frontal attack this time. The name of that snake deity is Leviathan. Causing great trouble in Los Angeles, the witch—no, divine ancestor—restored her ancient form to become a [Heretic God]. The secret mastermind manipulating her should be the master of Lu Yinghua."

"Haha, one of those names is completely unexpected while another is just as imagined."

"Just now did you say a deity of [Steel] sleeps in this place?"

Liliana watched the misty rain of blood falling from the snake.

"That Leviathan is almost like bait for [Steel], revealing a near dead body and looking like a sacrifice."

"Your choice of the word sacrifice is quite apt, and in fact that is the truth."

Amakasu nodded and agreed with the witch's opinion.

"The name of the spell that seals [Steel] in this shrine is the [Keeper of the Horses]. In order to release it, a dragon or snake deity is required to appear on earth. Though I've speculated on what kind of enemies may appear for breaking the seal, it was unexpected that a sacrifice of a snake deity could also fulfill conditions."

Amakasu's comments were suddenly interrupted.

The gridded door to the shrine opened abruptly and strong wind blew out from inside.

Out flew a transcendent beauty, who proceeded to soar in the sky like a celestial maiden.

Like a celestial maiden wearing a robe whose fabric seemed as light as a feather, she looked down upon Erica and the rest from the sky above the shrine, with an expression of complete disinterest as if seeing bugs. Her body was flowing with magical power that far surpassed the best of magi.

Just as she was about to fly away, Erica yelled.

"Please wait a moment, Your Eminence Luo Hao! What happened to my lord Kusanagi Godou!?"

These words had an effect. The celestial maiden stopped gliding and hovered in midair to answer her question.

"Just in this special case I shall answer you, blonde girl. Today should be our first encounter, how did you come to know the imperial appearance of I, Luo Hao?"

Completely beautiful, but the jade-like voice was full of resolution that seemed to reach into the depths of the listener.

Erica knelt on one knee and answered with a knight's etiquette.

"My name is Erica Blandelli, a great knight of the Copper Black Cross. Today is also the first time for me to be graced by Your Eminence's presence. Based on the current situation, I deduced there could be no other but Your Eminence Luo Hao."

The sacrificial snake deity, the young master of the Lu family, and the missing Kusanagi Godou.

And then the supernatural demoness appeared before their eyes , leaving only one answer to be deduced. Of course, Erica's response time was excellent, which is one of the reasons why she reached the answer.

In fact, Liliana and Amakasu were just staring at the cult leader in shock.

"King Kusanagi sure has a subject with excellent vision. In recognition of your wit, I shall answer you—that King was subdued by my martial splendor in the Netherworld, and has escaped to some other place. However, there is no shame in retreat , a staple in the art of war, and the manner he escaped from me, Luo Hao, was commendable."

Which is why he fled to that kind of place. Hearing the musical voice, Erica could not help feeling impressed. To have already battled against the demonic cult leader, Kusanagi Godou and trouble are truly inseparable.

"Then Your Eminence...!"

"Great Knight, the question and answer session ends here! I am on my way to conquest, and have no time for you!"

A shout that made one's body tremble.

No, it wasn't just trembling. Erica and Liliana, as well as Amakasu, everyone who heard Luo Hao's reproach were blown away as if struck by a storm.

Erica crashed into a cedar tree. Was that a shockwave just now? By the time she endured the pain and stood up, the Cult Leader had gone, flying towards the air above Toushouguu where Leviathan was located.

"Ah, let me just say that that person is very shocking, in all sorts of ways."

"Who could have thought that Cult Leader Luo Hao was a woman... And could use flying magic, could she also be a witch..."

The other two were also quite shaken.

"What should we do next? Go pick up Kusanagi Godou and the Mariya sisters, or confront Cult Leader Luo Hao and Leviathan? Or split up to do both?"

"Yes, if possible, I want us to split up too."

Erica was pondering Liliana's suggestion.

If possible, it would be best if both options were pursued, but it was important not to make the mistake of dividing their strength and getting taken out in isolation. Whether facing off against Cult Leader Luo Hao or searching for the three's location, both tasks required maximum manpower. If a choice wasn't made between the two, both could very well fail."

"We will pursue Luo Hao, since handling the current situation is a priority... Besides, entering the Astral Plane requires a great deal of preparation and there's no time for that now."

"Yes, this decision is quite appropriate. I understand."

Amakasu responded lightly as Liliana gazed towards the shrine .

"However, that means we ignore Kusanagi Godou and the Mariya sisters for now?"

There was no tone of reproach in her words, for Erica had made the most rational decision. But reason and feelings were separate, there was no other way, for Erica it must have been a heart-breaking decision.

"At least we already confirmed they are fine for now, so we're just lowering the priority for now. No problem, Godou is not someone who dies easily, I believe he will do his best to protect Yuri and Hikari."

At this time, strategic decisions were more important than emotional outbursts.

As Erica coldly analyzed, a sudden voice called to her.

"—Since that is the case, why not allow me to go to the Astral Plane?"

There was a young woman's voice, but no presence could be felt .

Erica looked at the direction of the voice, and so did Liliana and Amakasu. For someone to approach these three without them knowing, was truly a rare feat indeed, so they were all quite shocked.

"I am very unsuited to things like combat but I've been thinking all along about how I could be of help to you all... Fortunately I can be considered an expert in this area, so just leave it to me?"

From within the cedar forest out stepped a blonde beauty.

Roughly in her early twenties, she was wearing a luxurious white coat with long black boots.

Beneath the coat was a short knitted dress and leggings, giving a kind of elegant feeling like "a princess who sneaked out of the castle for a stroll in the streets"... That was only natural, for she was a true noblewoman, and a [Princess] at the same time.

As Erica caught sight of her gentle beauty, she was completely surprised.

Having met her last time in London with Uncle Paolo, of course Erica would be shocked to find her in this kind of place. Smiling mischievously, she put her index finger to her lips.

She really did look like she sneaked out.

Of all the people Erica ever met, the most brilliant and elegant lady had made her appearance. A sense of opposition naturally sprung. If she didn't let the [Princess] witness her grace as a noblewoman, she would have failed her name of Erica Blandelli.

"My lady—if you were to do so, it would be our most unexpected good fortune."

Deliberately avoiding addressing her as princess, Erica paid respect to her.

Acting as respectful as if this were a royal court, full of pride and pomposity.

"My lord and our allies the miko are still inside. If possible, please grant them your assistance."

Why and when did she come to Japan? These inappropriate questions should be avoided. When the right moment comes, she would likely explain her purpose herself. From the dialogue just now, it could be deduced that she already knew the basic situation, so Erica stated her request simply.

"I understand, though I can't guarantee a hundred percent... But a success rate of sixty-five or so should be sufficient to assure you all."

With a stiff expression, Liliana was watching the two converse. She had seen the [Princess]'s photo before, but the sudden appearance still made her greatly shaken.

Amakasu simply shook his head and shrugged.

"I see, so this lady here is acquainted with Erica-san... Is my assumption correct?"

"If you accept that, it would be a great help, because there are many long-winded fellows about. Even if I took a casual stroll outside, they will get very angry."

The [Princess] nodded, and added casually:

"By the way, I have a suggestion. Since that Leviathan is a key factor in releasing the dormant [Steel], if you think about it, removing her should be enough to prevent the god's revival. Though it will be difficult, please consider it."

She was a user of spirit vision similar to Mariya Yuri, and had attained great knowledge about gods.

Advice from her wisdom was greatly respected by upstanding magi and knights as the words of a sage, and Erica expressed her deep gratitude.

Part 3

As the intense storm assaulted the little house in the mountains, Godou looked at the old man.

This was his second time here, at the residence of the elderly god living "secluded" in the Netherworld, Susanoo. Opposite the cross-legged Godou, the solemn master of the house was sitting with one knee up.

Behind him were the two other familiar characters.

The flaxen-haired princess sitting formally in seiza[84], and the living buddha in the lotus position.[85]

"Of all places, why on earth did I have to come here?"

"Of course that is because my sword brought you here, just look carefully at Ama no Murakumo."

Godou complained while Susanoo answered with frivolous tones.

"So that sword really became my possession after all."

Thinking back to the pain he felt before the transfer, Godou looked at his right arm.

Backed into a corner by Luo Hao, they had already come here by the time he noticed. That time when they were transferred here must have been the will of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, which cut through the wall of the sealing barrier to enable them to escape outside.

True to the name of the divine sword that severed the earth from the Netherworld.

"Oh, looks like you still haven't grasped it, but one day you will master the sword, right? It has been my longtime partner, oh, do treasure it well."

"I have no intention of contravening the firearms and weapons regulations..."

Godou sighed. Despite what he said, if this fellow had not appeared to save them, most likely they would have died there just now.

Though he had no interest in picking up a sword, being ungrateful would bring retribution. At least the mystery was cleared up, the divine sword's most familiar location in the Netherworld was the residence of the original owner, so it chose to escape here.

"Putting that aside, could you return the Mariya sisters back to their original form?"

"No. Despite my straightforward character, I am a god after all. Even the monk and the princess will not easily appear before ordinary people. How could we permit humans who aren't even devil kings to appear in our presence? Anyway, you should just bear it for now."

Susanoo's answer made Godou look at the combs in his hands.

A pair of combs made from bamboo, one big, one small, were transformed from the Mariya sisters. When they transferred to this little house, Yuri and Hikari had fainted already. Godou then saw the elderly god muttering something unrecognizable which turned the sisters into a set of bamboo combs.

Finding himself the only one unaffected, Godou was angry of course.

But Susanoo had said they would recover once they left this house. As an apology, Susanoo alerted his miko Seishuuin Ena of the fact that the three of them were safe, thus temporarily appeasing Godou's anger.

"To be able to turn two girls into something like that..."

"The Netherworld is a very ambiguous territory that straddles the line between the fictional and the real world. That is why one can travel using thoughts, and gods like us can even change this world. Such a transformation is a piece of cake."

Despite his violent appearance, Susanoo's explanation was surprisingly complicated. If the sisters cannot be recovered, what are you going to do? As Godou secretly thought to himself, the black-clad monk spoke.

"By the way, have you caused some interesting commotion again?"

"I 'caused' nothing, I was just caught up in things!"

The mummy without bandages who became a buddha with a desiccated body. Godou strenuously objected to the monk who possessed such an appearance.

"Please have a look, Rakshasa Monarch, the monkey king has now changed into this."

The princess who wore a juunihitoe[86] style kimono, handed over a basin of water.

Reflected on the water surface was the stable with the stone monkey, but everything from the chest up was flesh. The eyeballs were red in color with golden pupils. It was a very intriguing appearance.

"To be honest, we are the ones who imprisoned the monkey king in the palace of the [Keeper of the Horses], and the central figure in solving the problem is—"

As the princess threw a glance at the monk in black, he showed his toothless mouth and said:

"Exactly, back when I was still on earth, I did that thing."

"It was you guys? Why would you do something like this... That monkey is a steel deity?"

Godou felt they were a hopeless bunch, didn't they sow the seeds of conflict themselves?

"That monkey king, is both a monkey and the possessor of the divinity of steel, a great hero surrounded by flames who subjugated dragons and snakes. Only extremely powerful [Steel] is capable of becoming the slayer of dragons or snakes."

"Slaying dragons and snakes?"

"Actually, my nation has a troublesome [Divine Child] currently asleep. A foreign god who drifted here from overseas, the divine child who is the strongest [Steel]. In order to prevent this god from waking up, we brought forth the monkey king to slay dragons and vanquish snakes."

The strongest [Steel], from where had Godou heard that before?

Somehow Godou had a sense of déjà vu, but the current pressing topic was the monkey.

"Why are dragons and snakes very troublesome?"

"You should already know, dragon and snake deities can make [Steel] more ferocious, and can also wake them up."

Godou recalled the incident of the hero Perseus.

What hastened his appearance was the presence of a dragon, it was much later when Godou was told of this.

"By the way, you too have once fought with a snake deity of the southern barbarians. Had you failed back then, we would surely have carried out the release ritual of the [Keeper of the Horses] for the monkey king."

"I keep hearing this term Keeper of the Horses, is that the name of that monkey god?"

"No, it's the name of an official position, a post in the Heavens... Simply put, it is the task of watching over the stables, managing the horses of the celestial court, that is the job of the Keeper of the Horses."

"By Heavens you mean?"

"The world of the gods and immortals ruled by the Jade Emperor."

A name appeared in Godou's mind, the original name of that playful monkey, his name as a god.

Godou attempted to speak out the name. Susanoo suddenly went "Heh!" over his breath; the princess stared wide; the monk in black smiled silently, grinning like a villain.

"You realized the true identity of the monkey god?"

"I just happened to think of it. Damn it, he could very well be more famous than Athena!"

Godou was left breathless, this was totally beyond the level of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

If that kind of fellow was to rampage on earth, how serious a calamity could not be underestimated.

"What could we do to seal that monkey once again?"

"The one releasing the binding spell of the [Keeper of the Horses] is the Tang[87] monarch. Should you be successful in defeating her personally, the monkey king will fall dormant once again..."

The princess spoke with worry. In other words, a battle with Cult Leader Luo Hao was required.

Godou couldn't help complaining. This was like the metaphor of having a tiger at the front door and a wolf at the back. No matter which choice he made he was in trouble. But compared to fighting a wolf and a tiger together at the same time, it was better to just fight the tiger alone.

Most importantly, he was worried about his friends back on earth, and wanted to return as quickly as possible.

"I will try my best... So there's something I want to discuss. Can you send me back to the surface?"

Faced with the decisive request, Susanoo and the monk in black looked at each other.

"What should we do? We are neither this guy's enemies nor his companions."

Recalling last time's incident, it was just as the elderly god described, and then the black-clad monk deliberate said:

"No no, Old One, this counts as a wandering stray. It's not like we don't know him, even though we are not very close either. But we cannot go against the ways of gods for the sake of the ways of men. That said, the method to return the Rakshasa monarch to the real world... is a bit difficult for us."

"Didn't you guys pull me in here last time on purpose?"

Feeling like they were putting on a show, Godou questioned.

"Last time, it was that idiot Ena who set up her tricks on earth. We have no ability to let you freely come and go from this place."

Recalling the spell that Seishuuin Ena used at the school, does that mean I am stuck in the Netherworld forever!? Godou was very shocked.

The one who interrupted at this point, was the princess possessing glass-like pupils.

"Enlightened One, Old One, pray show some restraint in your jokes. Rakshasa monarch, please hold this carefully."

She handed over a magatama[88] jewel.

It was made of jadeite. Godou could not comprehend the princess' intentions and pondered in puzzlement.

"This is just an ordinary magatama, but having worn it for so long, it is infused with my powerful psychic powers. For women linked to our snake blood, it serves as an excellent beacon."

"Snake blood?"

"If you're interested, try investigating the women known as divine ancestors. For example, those miko over there are my very very distant descendants."

She showed a demure smile.

"The miko seeking you in the Netherworld... This girl inherits the blood of snakes as a result of atavism. With this alone, she should easily find her way to your side."

"To receive me... Yes! It must be Erica and the rest!"

Making contact with Ena proved to be unexpectedly effective. Susanoo and the black-clad monk were likely aware of this and played dumb. Truly unpleasant characters, these old men.

"Let me lead you to a place more convenient for the one seeking you... The rest depends on your capacity and tolerance, I wish you luck."

"I am very grateful. If possible, I hope a day will come when I can repay your great kindness and grace."

Godou immediately bowed his head in respectful gratitude.

Naturally employing respectful manners towards the princess, was this what people called difference in character?

In her basin appeared scenery never seen before. No instructions were needed, after all, she was the one who taught him the method to travel in this mysterious world.

Godou watched the scenery reflected in the water as he concentrated and transferred there.

By the time he regained his senses, he was at the edge of a lake.

A scenic lakeside on a plateau, that was the feeling Godou got standing on this land.

The water was crystal clear, and the blowing breeze was very comfortable. Along the bank were neat rows of cedar trees.

"—Right, what about the Mariyas!?"

He recalled the sisters who had been turned into bamboo combs .

The two combs in his hands were gone, and Godou frantically searched his surroundings. Breathing a sigh of relief, he found the miko-outfitted Yuri and Hikari on the side of the lake.

Shaking their shoulders, the sisters soon woke up.

"This place... Are we still in the Netherworld...?"

"Yes... Onii-sama... My head hurts... I can't feel any strength..."

Hikari had been acting strange during the battle with Luo Hao, but it looked like she had recovered.

Godou made a brief explanation of how they got to be transferred here.

"So that's what happened, both of you were transformed... Do you feel fine?"

"Yes, yes, it seems like it. We have no memories of the time when we were transformed."

"I feel so tired, as if I had exhausted all my strength."

Compared to the older sister who could answer affirmatively, the younger sister still looked groggy.

"Anyway, since everyone is fine this counts as fortune amongst misfortune... By the way, just now they said someone will be coming to receive us, who knows how long it would take?"

"Should be Liliana-san coming right?"

Godou shook his head. Who knows?

Erica didn't seem like she knew the magic to travel to this Netherworld, which meant it should be Liliana. But from the manner the princess spoke, it seemed like this wasn't the case.

"I have arrived. Finally found you, Kusanagi Godou-san."

"Wah!"

Suddenly hearing his name, Godou jumped in surprise while Yuri and Hikari stared hard.

Somehow a beautiful woman was standing before them.

"Sorry to have surprised you all. You may not recognize me, but I am also your companion. Actually, I knew Erica Blandelli from before."

With dazzling blonde hair, she was a beautiful Caucasian lady.

Calm and smooth speech, elegant clothing, and a presence like perfume. Godou finally realized, it was a feeling that was very similar to Erica. Yuri looked at her incredulously.

"...Spirit body? Are you using a spell of spirit body separation?"

"Oh my, it's been so long since the last time I was found out so quickly. You are amazing."

Bearing an elegant smile, she praised Yuri, who became quite fearful. Spirit body separation?

Seeing Godou's doubt, the blonde beauty told him the truth.

"Known as ectoplasm or spirit body in the world of magic, a rough explanation would be a doppelgänger of the soul that is created through psychic sensing abilities. My real self is currently lying asleep on a bed in London... Please keep this a secret."

"I-I am really sorry, I saw it through spirit vision, and spoke without thinking."

Yuri frantically apologized as the princess raised a finger to her lips, expressing her hope for secrecy.

"No problem, even though it is top secret, I'm not going to sew up the mouths of people who know about it. Do I look as crazy as Cult Leader Luo Hao?"

Mischievously batting her eyes, it looked like the beauty was aware of the mastermind behind this commotion.

"Your request to keep this a secret, I got it. By the way, can you tell me your name?"

"During this trip, I was hoping to call myself the 'mysterious beauty who wished to stay anonymous' all along... But the king's request cannot be ignored. No other way, I shall answer."

A humorous self-introduction.

The blonde beauty elegantly smiled as she named herself.

"My name is Alice, and sometimes people call me princess, but that's too embarrassing to say it out myself."

"The Witenagemot's—!"

"S-Super important person! Too amazing!"

The self-introduction that was missing a last name, and even a nickname of princess.

Feeling like she seemed to hail from some royal or noble family, Godou smiled wryly. Beside him, Yuri and Hikari's great surprise suggested she was a very famous person. From her behavior, expressions and gaze, it was clear that she was full of the elegance of someone who belonged to the upper class.

Though there were a few things he wanted to criticize, Godou decided to ignore them after all.

In the past few months, Godou's strange friends had been increasing in number. A slightly strange person was no longer enough to unsettle Godou.

"Alice-san, did Erica ask you to come receive us?"

"Yes, I am both a miko and a user of witchcraft—"

Princess Alice thumped her own chest.

"Performing the magical ritual of plane walking, going from earth to the Astral Plane, and then searching for Kusanagi-sama using spirit vision after arriving. You were very difficult to find."

But then she was suddenly able to find Kusanagi Godou's location through spirit vision, Godou recalled the magatama kept in his pocket.

"Actually I was following the trail of a certain witch, and pursued all the way from France to Asia. The snake deity Leviathan that Cult Leader Luo Hao is using as a sacrifice, only survived till now as a result of that witch, which is why I changed my targets to the snake deity and the cult leader, and came to Japan. Then just now I happened to encounter Erica who was troubled by Kusanagi-sama's absence, and decided to assist her."

"The troublemaker was actually involved in underground activities on a worldwide scale..."

Hearing the simple explanation, Godou felt powerless. Though the trouble came from overseas, it also brought an ally like the princess here. If he thought that way, the situation didn't seem as dire.

—It was at this moment that Yuri drew near.

"Godou-san, I have an ominous feeling. Pursuers will be here shortly!"

Yuri warned with a voice full of tension. Pursuers?

Godou, Yuri, Hikari and Princess Alice were standing by the lake as tiny monkeys with golden fur almost the color of tea-brown suddenly appeared and surrounded them. Could this manner of movement be transfer!?

The little monkeys numbered almost twenty, and every one of them resembled the monkey divine monarch.

"The city of the [Keeper of the Horses] was a barrier designed to seal the divine monarch. But it cannot shut in his summoned divine messengers... Godou-san, what should be done?"

Come to think of it, that monkey god seemed quite intent on acquiring Hikari.

Surrounding them, the little monkeys slowly shrunk their distance, keenly watching every move of Godou's group.

Ask Yuri to use transfer to escape? From the manner they appeared, it was likely they would use the same method to follow, so the root of the problem would not be solved. Also, last time Ena went out of control during divine possession in the Netherworld, who knew if the same might happen to Yuri—

"Surviving this battle... Seems a bit difficult."

The Campione's senses told him the approximate strength of these enemies before him.

These monkeys were very strong. If Erica and Liliana's battle strength was rated ten, then these guys would be around four or five.

In other words, compared to a Campione's abilities, they were very weak enemies, but that would require Godou to use one of Verethragna's ten incarnations—

No good, none of the conditions for using any of the incarnations were met.

"Kusanagi-san, this is quite a bind. Could you drive away these monkeys using your authority?"

"I would have done it if I could. There are many restrictions to my powers which cannot be used freely. Against mediocre opponents like these, to be frank I am out of options."

Godou sighed as he replied to Alice's question, and began to think.

Though the monkeys count as wild beasts, they were much stronger than humans, and divine servants as well.

Though chances of victory were very low, he might as well struggle and put up a fight, or should he let Yuri use transfer and try to escape as much as possible? Unexpectedly, it was Princess Alice's words that ended his dilemma.

"Oh I see, then let me handle this. This will likely cause other troubles later, but there is no other choice."

Her beautiful blonde hair was full of brilliance.

In the instant the little monkeys jumped over with their grotesque nimble movements, just as Godou watched with his eyes wide open, Yuri protected her sister, and Hikari held on to her older sister, Princess Alice recited loudly:

"Can I see another's woe / And not be in sorrow too! Can I see another's grief / And not seek for kind relief!"[89]

This was a poem of spell words.

Silver white light poured forth, engulfing the monkey army and Godou's group.

"Ah!" "Onee-chan!"

Yuri and Hikari gave a brief yell, but did not seem to be in pain. On the other hand, the monkeys were in a pitiful state. Screaming loudly, they covered their eyes, protected their ears and began to roll around on the ground.

"...What did you do?"

"Using psychic sensing, I injected the impressions of pain and destruction directly into the monkeys' brains, forcing them to feel mental pain, subduing them all."

Hearing Alice's nonchalant explanation, Godou began to wonder if this lady wasn't so gentle and quiet after all. Beside him, the two miko were watching the monkeys' plight in shock.

"Though their hearts might be a little shaken, there is no major problem. Of course as a Campione, Kusanagi-sama will not be affected at all. However..."

A Campione had absolute resistance against magic. At this time, Alice bore a depressed expression.

Godou had an ominous feeling.

"In order to disable them, I exhausted a large amount of magical power in this spirit body. Now it is impossible to carry out the ritual to return to earth, though I still have enough magic to maintain contact with those on the surface... But they are currently dealing with Leviathan and I fear they can't spare any effort to bring you back."

The crowd of divine messengers released by the warlord of [Steel], what unexpectedly strong foes—

Hearing Alice's words, Godou felt the future was bleak. In order to defeat the pursuers they lost the way to return. Of course keeping everyone safe was the top priority, so the one who called herself princess made the correct decision.

But it was also true that they were now trapped in another dead end.

Was there a way to get out of this quandary? Godou struggled to think of a solution.

Part 4

The snake deity Leviathan transformed from the witch Asherah, was hovering in the air above Nikkou mountain. As it circled and coiled in the air, blood fell from wounds all over its body to produce mist and rain. All the tourists at Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine and Rinnouji were in a state of panic.

This was dusk on the first day of the October long weekend.

As the sun set, the number of tourists in the vicinity of Nikkou mountain had been decreasing.

Still there were close to a hundred of them at the scene. As the unnatural scene appeared in the sunset sky, the tourists were deprived of their sanity.

There were those who fled away quickly, those who clumsily ran as they rolled, and people who were separated from their companions.

Some were pushed over by others, and had their backs stepped on. There were people who ignored others while others cried.

People who had no idea whom to call, and people leisurely taking digital photos of the snake deity.

Shouting, sobbing, lamenting.

Shock, intrigue, excitement, anxiety.

Unsettled people, frantic people, lost people.

It was a state of panic, but very soon all of them stopped moving, just like children tired out from play or exhausted runaways, they stopped their steps, kneeling down, collapsing, lying down, immobile.

"Is that violent woman absorbing the essence of life force?"

Having climbed to the top of Toushouguu's Okusha inner shrine, Lu Yinghua whispered to himself.

This was the burial grounds of Tokugawa Ieyasu, at the highest level of Toushouguu. Speaking of Nikkou mountain, it was a mountain after all. From the foot of the mountain began the main visiting path up the stone stairs, then through the worship hall and main hall, one then had to walk two hundred and seven stone steps up to reach the Okusha inner shrine.

In the air was the violent woman—the slowly hovering snake deity once called Asherah.

The snake deity's blood created a circulating network of life which absorbed life force from the surrounding people into itself. This should not kill, but staying in that state for the long term could get dangerous.

"This woman is almost dead, and yet she's still making so much trouble for others. Whatever, it's nice to have some peace and quiet after all."

There were no signs of people in his immediate surroundings.

Compared to the gates of Youmeimon, main hall and divine stable down below, tourists willing to climb all the way up to the Okusha inner shrine were few in number. With the appearance of the serpent god, what few people immediately fled.

To Lu Yinghua this was quite fortunate.

Because the one who was about to arrive hated noise, it would be best to minimize annoying factors for her. At this moment, he noticed the woman flying over here.

It's his master! Immediately, he switched to a stance of "caution. "

As the beautiful master looked at him, he immediately held his right fist against his open left hand.

This was the traditional martial arts greeting of the fist. A necessary measure in order to preempt his master from admonishing him with the loud complaint "shouldn't you respect and greet your master properly!?" Just in case, he should also recite the slogan of followers of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains.

"May the immortal name of the wise and brave Cult Leader be sung, lasting as long as the heavens and the earth. Your infinite might, wisdom and mercy brings light to this world. Your disciple Lu Yinghua, wishes the master eternal longevity."

Holy Cult Leader Luo Hao, was the maiden whom very few people knew as Luo Cuilian.

She was an unaware tyrant, and people serving her needed to take care in all sorts of minute details.

As her direct disciple who was allowed access to her residence, the master's mood was an all important factor in Lu Yinghua's life of danger.

"—My young eagle, sycophancy on the battlefield is the act of corrupt officials and eunuchs!"

However, the beautiful master was frowning with displeasure, calling out her disciple's pet name.

"As a martial artist with heroic and manly aspirations, do not bring such shame to your elders!"

This time was a failure. With one shout, Lu Yinghua was blown away.

His back striking the tower behind him, he felt a little dizzy. This was a shockwave produced by the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl], which was not only capable of widespread destruction, but was also an authority that could be used like a fist when the power was suppressed.

Damn it, flattery went overboard and backfired instead. Lu Yinghua stood up again.

Usually he would be reproached for not greeting solemnly enough.

'Though the master-disciple relationship is akin to mother and child, I am the one who stands at the pinnacle of the Holy Cult while you are just a young follower. You have to be clear where you stand. Pay more attention!'

Despite her saying that, Luo Cuilian was one who viewed flattery with disdain, in other words, the crux of the matter depended on the Holy Cult Leader's mood that day. A most difficult and unreasonable condition.

"When King Kusanagi challenged me, I was a little impressed by your foresight... But you're still not pushing yourself enough for perfection!"

"Master's words of wisdom will forever be engraved in your disciple's heart. Allow me to express my utmost gratitude."

Anyway, let me bow my head and accept master's words first.

They had met a few hours ago, but if he reported everything he had done during this time, Lu Yinghua estimated he would receive a total of three educational instructions. There was no need to step on the tiger's tail on purpose.

—Preparing for master's arrival was Lu Yinghua's assigned mission.

Traveling to Japan from Hong Kong just for that, he had to rush back and forth between Tokyo and Nikkou a number of times. Rushing into the Kuhoudzuka home at Saitenguu, enlisting the leader's son using the witch's powers, making him speak about the seal of the [Keeper of the Horses], doing what was required for the Hime-Miko to come to Nikkou, and preparing for the seal's release .

The one who spent the most effort on today's incident was actually Lu Yinghua.

"Master, some interlopers are moving this way. What are your wishes?"

"I leave them to you, get it done for me."

Noticing people approaching, Lu Yinghua obtained the expected answer.

Gods and Campiones were the only opponents worthy enough to make the beautiful master serious.

Lu Yinghua shrugged and looked down. Toushouguu's main and worshipping halls, as well as Sakashitamon Gate's sleeping cat were about two hundred meters away. From the Okusha inner shrine occluded by cedar trees, one shouldn't be able to see anything.

However, his superhuman hearing caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

He heard the sound of two people using qinggong[90] to race across the ground with great agility, most likely Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar.

"...Well since master agreed, let's investigate a bit."

Lu Yinghua aimed at the stone statue of a crane before him, and struck it with his palm.

The ancient stone crane was instantly smashed, forming numerous fragments of stone. Placing these remains in his pocket, he spied the two leaping around like winged cats with only cedar branches as supporting footholds.

The girls arriving at Toushouguu using qinggong were the two great knights from Italy.

The two went past the five-story pagoda, through Omotemon Gate, and reached the area between the divine stable and the Sacred Warehouse of the Three.

At this time, Lu Yinghua began to fire.

Using only the right index finger, he shot stone pieces from his left palm. The striking of the finger—in other words, the act of finger flicking—sent the stones flying one by one with such extreme speed that they were like bullets.

The targets were of course the two people advancing!

This was the art of Tanzhishentong[91], one of the martial techniques taught by his master.

Against the incoming onslaught of stone pellets (roughly ten shots could be fired in a single breath), the girls immediately evaded. Struck in their stead, a hole was pierced on Youmeimon Gate.

Missed? Then let's shoot until it hits.

Lu Yinghua smiled with anticipation, and once again shot stone pellets with the tip of his finger.

The two girls nimbly dodged left and right to avoid the hail of bullets, even so, the troublesome bullets continued to descend. In that instant, the situation changed.

As the fired stone pellets approached the bodies of the female knights, they were deflected.

Seeing them blocked as if by an invisible wall, Yinghua muttered:

"A spell impervious to arrows, hmm, looks like projectiles are no good anymore."

Operating on similar principles to weapon deflecting spells used by the Righteous Harmony Society during the late Qing dynasty.[92]

A Daoist art(called magic in Europe) for deflecting arrows and the bullets of firearms, it easily repelled shots fired by normal people and could only be overcome by weapons infused with great spiritual powers or arrows fired by masters.

Though Lu Yinghua was a martial arts prodigy, he was not a sharpshooter.

Then let's decide things with close-quarter combat—this time, he leapt to the roof of the Toushouguu worship hall.

The qinggong techniques taught by his master far surpassed the European great knights he was about to fight.

Making contact in the Netherworld happened a short while ago.

Princess Alice's mental waves were able to transcend the gap between the earth and the other world. This godly feat was only possible for the Miko-Hime whose spirit powers of psychic sensing had developed to such a degree.

However, Erica and Liliana could not help sighing when they heard the news that there was no way for them to return.

"What should we do? Suspend this plan and go retrieve Kusanagi Godou?"

Liliana made the suggestion since she was the only one left who could go over there.

But if the blue knight left, then facing Leviathan and Cult Leader Luo Hao alone would be too risky for Erica.

Erica thought for a while, then proposed her amendments to the plan. The princess in the Astral Plane should also be able to receive the plan through psychic sensing. Having decided, Erica transmitted her thoughts through mental waves.

—Yes, let's go along with this plan, we will prepare from over here. I wish you all luck.

"So that's it, Lily, let's start."

"What a reckless plan, but that is all we can do. No matter what, if we do not take drastic measures, a Campione's will could not possibly be hindered."

Memorizing the new plan, Erica and Liliana rushed towards Toushouguu.

As a side note, Amakasu had left the scene taking the unconscious Kuhoudzuka gentleman along with him. Even though he was highly skilled in secret operations, onmyoudou[93] and white magic, a ninja's combat ability was not especially high, and there was no need to accompany them.

"The vanguard is coming, Lily."

"Hmph, arriving from the air, what an ostentatious youth."

Evading the attacks from above, they charged forth.

Finally descending from the sky, Lu Yinghua gazed at the two great knights.

"I have been waiting, Nee-san. If you wish to see my master, she is currently busy. If you have to intrude no matter what, then let me be your opponent."

Casually looking down from the worship hall of Toushouguu, Lu Yinghua spoke.

His posture resembled a phoenix at rest—aged fourteen, rather than calling him young, he would be better described as immature.

However, his awe-inspiring presence was worthy of his position as the devil king's disciple.

"Ah, looking so disinterested usually, but today you are passionately tempting us."

"Under the watchful eyes of my master, I have no leisure to dally, and must defeat you two using my full strength."

The young martial artist sneered at Erica's joking attempts.

It was a strange smile, a product of some twisted emotion rising up from the heart. However, the confidence in that smiling face was authentic. Could he really believe that he could obtain victory fighting against two great knights at once?

What gave Erica doubt, was the slight sense of masochism seen in Lu Yinghua's smile.

"Yes, even for me, fighting the two Nee-sans here is a little dangerous. I'd probably lose three times out of ten?"

"In other words, you will win seven times? How audacious."

The one who replied quietly was Liliana.

Boasts of grandeur and haughtiness were often sources of power. Confidence and presence were prerequisites for talent and skill to shine. In the world of battles, cases of an arrogant genius outperforming a modest genius were too many to list.

"Competing with you seems quite attractive."

"A pity then, our target is not you so we must decline your invitation."

Erica and Liliana wrapped their respective red and black or blue and black capes around their bodies. The capes known as bandiera, only great knights were allowed such battle attire.

"Heh, are you really planning on challenging my master? Doing so would be foolhardy rather than brave, I advise you it is better to give up."

"No, and it's not her either... Let's start, Lily."

"Very well, though we are at a disadvantage. However we cannot ignore this battle for that will taint our honor as knights."

In Erica's hand was the magic sword Cuore di Leone.

On the other hand, Liliana wielded the magic sword Il Maestro.

These magic swords were forged as a pair, using Wootz steel from Damascus. Sharp enough to sever concrete blocks in one stroke, they also amplified the magic of the wielder, furthermore, each possessed the special attributes of [Indestructible] and [Magic Melody] respectively.

The two of them entered full battle preparedness.

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? "[94]

"People, listen to David's song of mourning! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"[95]

Simultaneously, they chanted the spell words.

"But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of wild oxen!"[96]

The spell words of loathing and despair. Erica's [Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me].

"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty!"[97]

The requiem mourning for an ancient hero. Liliana's [Song of the Bow].

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."[98]

"O bow of Jonathan, the warrior's weapon fast as an eagle and strong as a lion. Descend into my hand now!"

Both moves were advanced battle magic that could bring pain to gods.

Unfamiliar with European magic, Lu Yinghua's expression started to tense as he noticed extremely ominous spell words of disaster gathering around in Erica and Liliana's surroundings.

When they made the decision to employ these two mystic rituals, the two knights had already abandoned trying to move in secret. Lu Yinghua and Luo Hao would immediately notice such powerful magical presences and there would be no time to hide.

"Be dismissed, Lu Yinghua! Light be lost, breathing stopped!"

Erica yelled.

The spell words of loathing and despair, had the power of restraint in this world. Those commanded will actually lose their sight and even stop beating their heart.

"Disaster falls upon those who block my path! Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!"

Liliana's shouts followed.

Bound by the hero's requiem, objects lose their form as commanded, and everything pointed at by her finger collapsed into dust.

True to his title as the martial hero, Lu Yinghua was able to block these spells.

"Hmm—! What troublesome spells!"

Roaring angrily, he struck himself with his left fist slightly above the heart.

Stimulating the pressure point of Tanzhongxue[99], he strengthened the qi life force in his body. This middle energy center[100], along with the lower energy center below the navel—both were major pressure points responsible for the flow of magical power in European magic.

As long as the flow of magical power within the body was strong enough, one was immune to the effects of outside magic.

The absolute resistance of a Campione towards magic was simply due to harboring magical power within the body that far surpassed the best magi.

Having undergone his master's inhumane training, Lu Yinghua could be considered a genius in the area of qigong.[101]

Raising magical power instantly to block Erica and Liliana's curses could be considered a godly feat. However, their true purpose was not to neutralize the devil king's direct disciple.

They only aimed to prevent him from making the first attack for a short period of time.

Their goal was apparently successful, and during the moment when Lu Yinghua focused on his internal body and could not physically attack, the two great knights began the next step.

Erica instantly applied magic to Cuore di Leone.

The spell of Iron Alchemy—Transformation. The slender beloved sword was transformed into a pilum, the throwing spear used by soldiers of the ancient Roman Empire. Infused in it were the spell words of loathing and despair.

Liliana stabbed her magic sword Il Maestro into the ground.

Instead her hands now wielded the bow and arrows of blue light. The bow of Jonathan that took form from the requiem of the ancient hero, the weapon that once shot the hero Perseus.

Simultaneously, the two great knights sent their projectiles towards the sky.

The target was the silvery white snake hovering above Nikkou mountain, near her throat—

Flying in the air, the ground beneath was a flat plain without any obstructions. The only factors to consider were the distance and the accuracy of the shooters.

From the very start, they were planning to attack Leviathan.

The pilum and the arrow rushed through the air.

In a most splendid manner, these magically born weapons pierced the snake deity's throat.

Chapter 7 - Giant Killing

Part 1

Leviathan's massive body began to crash slowly towards the ground.

Particles of light were scattering in the air as the body fell like a weightless feather, an unnatural trajectory of descent.

The silvery white body of the snake gradually disappeared. By the time it reached several tens of meters above the ground, only Asherah's pale body remained, and on her throat were two large piercing wounds.

Asherah's body finally fell on the topmost part of Toushouguu, the Okusha inner shrine.

"Unable to maintain the form of a snake, if this continues, the key to releasing the binding seal of the [Keeper of the Horses] will.. ."

Cult Leader Luo Hao murmured to herself as she approached.

The convulsing young girl was vomiting frothy blood. Luo Hao lifted the girl's arm to examine her pulse and nodded, standing up immediately.

"My young eagle! While I treat this witch, you help me stop the knights."

She ordered her disciple who was two hundred meters below.

Due to the her beautiful voice being full of qi trained from neigong[102], it could be transmitted even across such distances.

"Wow, that violent woman still lives after that. Wait a minute, turning into a snake becomes an existence on the level of [Heretic Gods], so there's nothing to be surprised about...?"

Hearing the instructions, Lu Yinghua stared hard as he stood on the roof of Toushouguu's worship hall. On the other hand, the two great knights who pierced the snake deity's throat were smiling at each other.

"See, the best way to eliminate Leviathan was just as I said."

It was just before advancing upon Toushouguu, after Princess Alice had transmitted her mental waves from the Astral Plane.

In coordination with the other side, Erica made a conclusion.

"Lily and I will attack directly. If it's the spell words of David, then even gods can be damaged. The flying target's vulnerabilities are fully exposed in the air, oh? It will definitely work."

"Since the snake deity's life is ending soon anyway, this method does not seem so absolutely ridiculous after all."

Liliana calmly nodded.

Ignoring her private life (especially in the area of love), Liliana in battle was very calm and composed.

"Of course, if we take it slowly, there will be interference from Luo Hao and Lu Yinghua. If we target Leviathan on our first strike , I believe the chances of success will be very high."

Lu Yinghua was highly skilled in qigong, but was not an expert on magic or Daoist arts.

He was unlikely to be acquainted with the mystic arts of magic such as the spell words of the hero David. The problem was his master, and Erica recalled the encounter near the shrine --

"Luo Hao probably won't be wary of Lily and me as enemies, so if we target Leviathan from the start, it will work for sure. However..."

"Afterwards is the real problem. We will need to fight the cult leader seriously."

The only existence on earth that could fight evenly with a Campione was another Campione, which is why they sent Princess Alice to pick up Godou.

"In the end, after eliminating Leviathan, we still need a Campione's power. But if that ritual continues, [Steel] will be awakened... We have no options."

"Yes, so that is why we gamble everything on this."

Erica continued explaining as Liliana shook her head, troubled by the dilemma.

"You already know that Kusanagi Godou possesses the authority of Verethragna, the Persian Warlord who flew over the land, the protector who saved the people. So --"

Liliana nodded in agreement with Erica's suggestion.

The mental waves from the princess in the Netherworld also approved.

And so the two knights charged courageously, and successfully downed Leviathan.

Currently, Luo Hao had given orders to her disciple, who prepared to take on Erica and Liliana.

Though it was unclear at this point, there was also the possibility that the snake deity could be revived.

"Worrying about others at this point, you two sure are confident !"

The youth and his voice descended at the same time.

Just like last time, there was not a single sound. As an advanced physical technique, it required complete control of one's weight, muscle strength and activity in order to attain this level. Though Erica and Liliana were also quite accomplished in this area, they were outmatched by far.

The silver-haired knight immediately reached out and pulled out her beloved sword from the ground.

Seeing this action, Lu Yinghua smiled at the corner of his lips and immediately charged with god-like speed.

At the distance of an arm's length, he struck with his right fist, aiming for Liliana's right hand which held the magic sword! With gliding steps, Liliana evaded.

"You are the confident one instead! Deliberately attacking the one with the weapon."

"Haha! Fighting an unarmed sword fighter? I wouldn't do it even if someone paid me to!"

Because Erica had thrown her beloved sword at Leviathan, she was currently weaponless.

Disregarding this situation, the youth still chose to attack the armed opponent. Liliana took her magic sword and slashed at the incoming right arm. If she was able to cut an artery or a muscle, victory would be decided.

But the young martial artist withdrew his arm to escape the magic sword.

Like a whip, the withdrawn hand attacked Liliana's face. Against this move which combined offense with defense as one, Liliana raised her left arm to defend.

"Heh, neither slow in speed nor in reaction. Yes, you do have some skill..."

Lu Yinghua leisurely commented.

Fighting an armed opponent with no signs of fear, it appeared that he had not even begun to get serious.

Liliana held Il Maestro at mid-level.

Slowly tracing out a curve with its form, she wielded the saber with one hand. This was the magic sword that formed a pair with Cuore di Leone, and in the past, the two were discovered together in the catacombs beneath Florence.

"Erica, looks like he wants to have a chat with me, you should hurry over to the cult leader."

Seeing her old friend's rare attempt at a joke, Erica smiled in response.

"Lily, is that really fine? If you say that, then I will become the main character, oh?"

"To be frank, that is no good at all, but there is no other way. I have already started here and the opponent has yet to show his true power, how could I stop here!"

While Liliana yelled loudly, her opponent the youth gave off a sense of unpressured ease.

"You go first, there is no other choice. I will finish him. I already mentioned before, your taking the spotlight has already gone on too far!"

"In that case, I won't refuse your offer, I'll be on my way~~"

Using [Leap], Erica jumped onto the roof of Toushouguu's worship hall as Lu Yinghua gazed at her back with eyes like a ferocious bird of prey.

"Didn't I say I will fight you both at the same time!"

Yelling, he rushed over and once again flew to the top of the worship hall.

No good. If this continued, he will start hunting like his namesake[103] the eagle. Liliana immediately leapt onto the roof and blocked Lu Yinghua's path.

And then she released the seal on the magic sword Il Maestro.

Erica was not the only one who hid the true power of her beloved sword. The steel of the master musician[104] began to transform. The curved blade remained the same, but the hilt portion was extended for almost a meter, giving the weapon an appearance that now resembled a spear or a glaive.

Ding... With a light sweep, a wonderful tone was heard.

Like the sound of a xylophone being played, it was music that suited the name of the conductor.

"The essence of fantasy, steel that plays brilliant melodies! I beseech you, grant unto me invisible wings!"

Ultimate move -- the words to release the [Magic Melody].

Lightly brandishing Il Maestro in its glaive-like form, a series of tones were heard.

With another swing, the tones continued, and Liliana rhythmically performed with the musical tones.

Lu Yinghua's pupils began to lose their sharp glint, watching Liliana before him, the eagle eyes which had been focused obliquely on the leaping Erica became confused for an instant.

-- He fell for it!

Confirming it, Liliana thrusted Il Maestro at Lu Yinghua's chest.

True to form as the martial artist, he recovered his senses before the sword struck and jumped back a large distance.

"...So that weapon has a strange effect."

"This is the magic melody. The magic sword Il Maestro is the steel of the master musician that can perform marvelous music. For someone like me who has mastered music and martial arts, playing all kinds of magic melodies can become a second weapon."

This time it was Liliana's turn to look down at her opponent.

She was now standing on the rooftop of Toushouguu's worship hall, while Lu Yinghua stood on the ground since his leap just now had jumped off the roof.

Liliana brandished Il Maestro as if displaying the form of her martial arts.

And then a mysterious metallic tune was heard, the magic melody just now that disrupted the listener's thoughts. In a serious battle it could break the concentration of the opponent and create openings.

In addition there were many other magic melodies with different effects, such as weakening the enemy's magical power or physical endurance.

"Tsk -- what an unassuming but contemptible spell!"

Lu Yinghua roared angrily and then began to raise the magical power in his body.

The same method for magical defense that he used against the curse of David, however, this was also countered.

"Pray bestow life, mother who brings death! Grant unto me the signs of the dark earth!"

Chanting new spell words, Liliana used magic, witchcraft that manipulated the earth.

The ground beneath Lu Yinghua began to soften. This was a sinister spell that made the ground surface lose its hardness, turning into mud, transforming into a bottomless marsh, directly sinking the target into the depths of the earth.

An outstanding mage would probably use opposing magic or the blessing of fortune to neutralize or surpass its effects.

For a Campione like Godou, as long as they raised their magic within their body, the spell's effect would naturally disappear. Their resistance to magic was such that even area effect spells would automatically lose effect. But for Lu Yinghua, even though he was a genius at qigong, as a normal person he could never reach a Campione's level.

Whether sword skills of a knight, Chinese martial arts, magic, Daoist arts, etc... Even if one were to develop any of these skills to its pinnacle, a human would still be unable to match the extraordinary magical power of Campiones or gods.

Hence Lu Yinghua could only let his legs be devoured by the bottomless marsh, and he had already sunk down to his knees.

"...Against an opponent that can use both magic and the sword, one definitely needs to prepare tactics beforehand."

However, he still remained completely composed, just as calm as usual.

It was a bottomless marsh with the consistency of glue and without a single foot hold.

Lu Yinghua made a light jump and landed on a nearby patch of magically unaffected ground.

This sort of action was impossible with just the lightness of the body. The difficulty would be akin to walking on the surface of water using floating wooden planks. Liliana could not believe that someone had actually trained their physical techniques to such a level --

"Since Erica-neesan has escaped already, it looks like I'll need to go all out now."

Lu Yinghua entered a stance and opened his palms. Liliana stared with her eyes wide open.

He was renowned for his outstanding qinggong and overwhelmingly powerful palm strikes. Liliana had already witnessed the former many times but Lu Yinghua had yet to use the latter, his palm strikes -- to this point he still had not used his strongest weapon!

"Nee-san, I'm just about to use my prided technique!"

Part 2

Casting as many protective spells on herself as possible, Erica ran up the stone steps.

To the highest place in Toushouguu -- the Okusha inner shrine.

Of course, Cult Leader Luo Hao was right there, kneeling down with her back to Erica. In front of the demonic cult leader was Asherah with two wounds on her throat. As blood flowed out continuously, her life slowly ebbed away.

Written on the ground beside the witch were geometric shapes and Chinese characters.

Most likely a magic circle for Daoist arts, the eight characters of *Qian*, *Dui*, *Li*, *Zhen*, *Xun*, *Kan*, *Gen* and *Kun* were particularly large.[105] This was likely what was sustaining Asherah's life.

"We meet again, blonde knight."

Luo Hao didn't even turn her head back.

"I must commend you for figuring out the snake was the key to disrupting the ritual, and the plan to eliminate it first. However, you will obstruct no further."

What was surprising was that her tone of voice did not carry any anger.

Spoken calmly with finesse.

Perhaps this was the magnanimity of a great one, Erica felt very impressed. Luo Hao completely disregarded her as an equal existence, and probably treated it as mischief from a dog or a cat.

"My apologies, Your Eminence, forgive me but I cannot follow your order."

"If so, great knight, I feel that with your outstanding talent, it would be quite a shame to kill you, which is why I warned you specifically... A real shame, you are dismissed."

In the instant the last sentence sounded, Erica felt like her entire body was crushed.

By the time she noticed, she was already lying fallen on the ground.

She deduced she must have been hit by a shock wave, but Erica had no idea when Luo Hao had made her attack. It was a feeling like being crushed by a giant truck.

"Oh... To be still alive, I see, you used protective magic on your body. What a well-prepared girl. If only my young eagle could be as cautious and thoughtful as you, I would admit he has finally grown up..."

Fallen over on her back, Erica's view included the Nikkou sky dyed red by the setting sun.

She was unable to see what kind of expression Luo Hao bore, but most likely she was still facing Erica with her back. Whether a great knight or an archmage, either would just be like grass on the roadside to her. Humans did not have any value she approved.

Having thought of that, Erica slowly began to get up.

First she raised her body. Standing up didn't matter for now, but at least she had to raise her upper torso and show off she was still alive. This was the minimum dignity. And then she called *his* name.

"...Your Eminence, I have the duty to report something to you!"

Straining her throat, she yelled with all her strength.

Blood came out together with her voice, probably indicative of internal injuries?

"It is a transgression for a great knight to stand before you, therefore, I shall summon my lord."

"Oh? Your lord is -- King Kusanagi?"

"Yes, he is the king of kings, and will one day surpass all his senior Campiones and lord over the world as the ultimate devil king, raising the blade of resistance against your tyranny."

Erica could feel the cold autumn wind on her cheek, and inhaled.

Unable to ascertain whether he would come, it was only a possibility. Having made such a strong declaration, failure would bring shame to the family.

But despite such a risk, she had to say it.

She wanted to let this person before her, or rather the girl who looked like a person, witness the principle that things cannot be judged from appearances.

The youth she loved would never let her struggle alone in such conditions. If he failed to come, she was prepared to haunt him for the rest of his life. These kinds of stupid thoughts entered Erica's mind as she yelled:

"Come, Kusanagi Godou! Your woman is dying here, can you allow your opponent's abuses to continue unchallenged!? Fly here immediately, and avenge me!"

The wind began to pick up, starting as an autumn breeze.

Immediately it became stronger, from blowing winds to a cyclone, and then bone-chilling strong winds, finally becoming a gale that heralds a storm.

"You being my woman... Somehow I feel like a correction is necessary but leave it for later. I will definitely avenge you, so please rest now. Also, thank you for reminding me about this power."

It was the voice of the youth who had been missing a few hours ago.

In the center of the swirling storm winds, his appearance gradually became tangible. Behind him were Mariya Yuri and Hikari as well as the princess. Erica knew she won her gamble.

The ancient Persian Warlord named Verethragna was the god of victory possessing ten incarnations. Becoming the protector god of the people through the changing times, the [Wind] symbolized this attribute of his. Transforming into the wind blowing over the Eurasian continent, he protected the people of all lands.

As an authority of Kusanagi Godou's, it was a mode of transport with extremely stringent restrictions.

Only when someone close to him was in a crisis, could he fly to their aid, transcending space.

"However, could Verethragna's authority move between earth and the Netherworld?"

This was after defeating the little monkeys, when they had made contact with the real world.

Hearing Erica's proposal from the princess, Godou was uncertain.

"In Persia he was the deity worshiped as the one who led the way, like Hermes of Greece, an emissary god of travel who journeyed across the world, and can freely move between the earth and the underworld. Considering all this, it is not impossible, but the question is whether Kusanagi-sama's authority can really activate..."

Godou nodded at Alice's explanation, and they had nothing to do but try it out. But then, what now?

--Just as he was pondering, Yuri's determined expression entered his sight.

"I feel that Erica-san's idea will be successful, Godou-san, please make your decision."

Her tone of voice was completely filled with confidence, and Godou immediately noticed the reason.

Earlier he had heard that within the Netherworld, there was some degree of control over that oracle-like power.

"Mariya, did you use spirit vision?"

"Yes, though of course my spirit vision is not a hundred percent accurate, there are occasional mistakes... But I want to believe."

"Believe?"

"Godou-san definitely will not ignore the disaster on earth, and cannot abandon Erica-san in a deadly crisis during her time of need, so for sure you will return to the real world."

A statement full of trust but very serious and heavy at the same time.

Godou lightly sighed, lifting his head. If he failed, perhaps he would never be able to hold his head high again.

Though the topic was heavy, Godou felt gratified. Wasn't it a man's greatest happiness to be relied upon and trusted by girls like this? Besides, he had always relied on the assistance of Yuri's spirit vision, and there was no need to doubt.

"...So it is decided. Please tell Erica this: I will leave things on the surface to you and Liliana. I will definitely return, and you must call my name."

That was what he said to Alice to let them begin the operation.

After that, all he could do was wait.

Standing by the lakeside, Godou waited for Erica's summoning. Using the [Wind] form required an open area where wind could blow. This place was fine.

At this time, Godou noticed Yuri acting a little strange.

At a distance away from him, the girls had a discussion with their heads down. Godou did not hear their conversation, but Hikari and Alice immediately left.

"What is going on, Mariya? For everyone to return together, it would be best to have them close by."

He questioned the Hime-Miko who was slowly approaching with an unexpectedly red face. The [Wind] incarnation had the ability to take people in the surroundings along for the instantaneous transfer.

"I-I know, but I feel it is better to have them leave for a while..."

"Why? If Erica called us, Alice and Hikari will be left behind here? Hurry and call them back."

To Godou, this was very reasonable, but Yuri replied with a shocked expression.

"B-But, are we not going to be doing *that* next...?"

"Eh? That? What do you mean by *that*?"

"By mentioning *that*, of course I mean *that* thing. Did I not mention already, even if we do *that* I am completely fine with it... D-Do not make me repeat myself."

Though embarrassed, Yuri was clearly determined.

Said that way, of course Godou realized, and he felt his heart beginning to race.

"You will be fighting Cult Leader Luo Hao soon. In order to neutralize her authority with the spell words of the [Sword], you must first prepare properly here. I thought you knew that already."

Likely aware that she was daringly approaching Godou, Yuri's face had turned completely bright red. Her appearance was very adorable.

"B-But Mariya barely saw any of my fight with Luo Hao, right? So you couldn't have obtained knowledge on her authorities?"

"No... No, actually I saw it."

His improvised excuse was instantly rejected by Yuri.

"In the stable when we escaped from the monkey divine monarch, I saw Godou-san and Luo Hao's fight through spirit vision, that was when she used the song of destruction... During the last transfer to escape, I also saw the Buddha Guardian derived from the Benevolent Kings and viewed with spirit vision the god's authority. Therefore..."

At some point in time, Yuri had started gazing at Godou with tears in her eyes.

"This is the only way I am able to help Godou-san in your fights . So at least let me do all that I can to assist you. O-Or is that not acceptable...?"

Begging him, Yuri's pink lips were trembling gently.

To force a girl like her to go so far, he was truly an idiot. Witnessing everything, Godou prepared himself and drew his lips near her.

"Mariya -- We are starting, is that OK?"

"Yes, very well. Just do as you desire, I am ready any time -- yes ."

The contact between lips, began with light nibbling at first.

The second time was more intense, deeper, richer, and she responded in kind, sucking away at Godou's lips. The two tongues tangled, and saliva mixed continually.

Transmitting knowledge and images through the mouth.

This was the only method to circumvent a Campione's absolute resistance against magic and allowed spells to take effect. Starting the transmission of knowledge, the information obtained by Yuri's spirit vision flowed continuously into Godou's mind.

About the source of the [Divine Might of Vajrapani], the Benevolent King[106] Buddha Guardians.

About the source of the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl], the Hindu goddess Gayatri.[107]

"Godou-san... Please... Accept more from me, take all the knowledge from within me, using greater and more strength to absorb it all, I do not mind even if you act a bit more rough... Yes... "

"Mariya...!"

Moaning softly, a ritual of mutual harmony.

Caught within this whirlpool, Godou heard some faint background noises.

'Wow! ...Just like Princess said, Onee-chan and Onii-sama are doing amazing things!'

'Of course, luckily we came to watch? Your elder sister was definitely trying to conceal some secret! ...But I never thought it would be something this shocking.'

Voices whose identities needed no confirmation, it was the dialogue between the young girl and the beauty.

'W-Wow wow! ...I-I saw the tongue extend inside there! Onee-chan is so serious all the time, to think she would engage in this kind of behavior -- I-Is that the deep kissing of adults?'

'T-These two are so audacious, the sun is still so high, and also in the great outdoors...'

Hearing those tiny voices full of excitement, Godou began to feel a bit embarrassed.

Why do those two have to peek!

Godou secretly checked out the face of the girl whose lips had been in contact with his for so many times. Yuri was already completely immersed in the activity, giving her all, single-heartedly offering her lips akin to cherry blossom petals, leaning her burning hot body against him. Wonderful, she hasn't noticed.

"Mariya... You too... Should focus more attention on my body, don't think about unnecessary things, just focus on transmitting knowledge to me, got that?"

Lightly whispering by her ear, Godou casually bit Yuri's ear and licked with his tongue. The Hime-Miko's body shuddered lightly and embraced him with her arm.

"Yes... Very well, Godou-san... I will only think of you!"

Yuri's slender arms were currently hugging his back very tightly with all her strength.

Gazing at Godou with tearful eyes, her facial expression was not only beautiful but carried a certain seductiveness that ran counter to the image of the pure Yamato Nadeshiko -- No! Precisely because of that, there was an even greater layer of feminine charm.

In that instant, Godou also forgot about the pair peeking at him from somewhere. He embraced Yuri in turn and mercilessly held her tight.

"Ah -- G-Godou-san, it hurts a little..."

Though she was saying that, Yuri continued to close her eyes and offered her body to Godou. Relaxing her body, she gave herself to his rough embrace.

Godou's entire body could feel the tactile sensations of the Hime-Miko pressed tightly against him.

The warmth from the skin, a tangible sense of the body that could be felt even through the miko outfit, as well as the surprisingly ample breasts, the soft thighs entangled around him, Godou could feel everything.

"I-I will not hesitate any more... Will stay by your side forever, giving my all for you, so Godou-san, please never let me go...!"

"I know, you must forever stay by my side, Mariya, starting from now remain with me -- absolutely never leave!"

"Yes! Promise -- no, this is our contract, I will offer everything to you, so please be victorious this time...! I will wait for your safe return!"

"Yes, leave it to me, so Mariya, give me even greater power -- !"

Her black hair glimmered like black pearls, with a heavy shade of brown.

Despite her frail and slender body, she was exceptionally feminine, hiding a most voluptuous figure.

Smelling the maiden's fragrance, Godou kissed the rose-colored cheek and then returned to Yuri's lips, lightly pushing her teeth apart, letting their tongues tangle with one another, sucking their saliva. Currently they were completely immersed into the activity.

Without any spare thoughts for other matters, only thinking of each other, transferring knowledge and impressions, two hearts linked as one, only kissing without pause, embracing passionately.

'...............R-Really amazing.'

'...............Y-Yes. Those two are far more passionate and bolder than they look...'

The tiny voices somehow had become even quieter.

With the disappearance of the obstructing observers, Godou obtained the necessary knowledge at the same time.

Discovering there was no longer a need to continue, the two separated their lips, a strand of saliva hanging between their mouths as a remnant of the intense passion that passed. Somehow there was a feeling of reluctance to separate.

Gazing at each other, the two were bright red from embarrassment, though they did not avert their eyes.

In the end the two smiled, for not only knowledge and body, but their hearts also felt tangibly as one in that instant, but now --

Rustle... Rustle... Hikari slowly walked out of some trees and bushes nearby.

She was showing a dazed expression as if having a high fever. Alice also appeared from behind her. Both of them looked very embarrassed, and neither dared to look at Godou and Yuri directly .

"H-Hikari -- !? Did I not ask you both to leave!? Why are you here?"

Yuri was greatly shocked, for she did not expect to be watched.

On the side, Godou could not say a word. He had completely forgotten the existence of this most unladylike pair. Anyway, it would be best not to mention that he noticed they were peeking just now.

"Sorry, Onee-chan... I saw it."

"-- !?"

The younger sister's embarrassed confession, made the older sister give out a pitiful scream. It was probably her usual refined behavior that helped her hold things together despite the great shock.

"S-So I have something to ask Onee-chan... Kissing feels very nice after all, right? Or does it really make your heart beat fast? Onee-chan and Onii-sama were so engrossed into it, so I really want to know what it feels like..."

"Y-You you you are too young to be interested in this kind of thing! I will not allow it!"

Yuri admonished seriously. Though she spoke like this, it was completely unconvincing since she herself engaged in activities that could not be described as morally upstanding.

Hearing the dialogue between sisters, Godou and Alice looked at each other silently, but in the instant their gaze met, the two immediately averted their eyes, feeling very embarrassed.

"Come, Kusanagi Godou! Your woman is dying here, can you allow your opponent's abuses to continue unchallenged!? Fly here immediately, and avenge me!"

Godou heard the voice at this very instant.

It had only been a few hours, but he missed the voice of this girl very much. In order to fulfill the conditions for using [Wind], she risked her own life.

"What 'my woman', don't make decisions like that on your own. .."

Godou protested, but this was a savior in more ways than one.

With the awkwardness from just now all blown away, Godou waved to the girls all around him.

Everyone gathered and waited, prepared to ride the wind away.

From the Netherworld back to the surface, setting off for the Japanese ancient holy sanctum where his companions awaited! As the violent winds disappeared from around them, Godou and his group had arrived at the Okusha inner shrine at the top of Toushouguu.

Before his eyes were Erica and a naked girl lying on the ground, as well as the back of the demonic cult leader. Who knew just the back view of the girl dressed in a mandarin gown[108] could be so beautiful?

But at the same time, Godou's fighting spirit as a Campione was reaching boiling levels in his mind.

"Erica, can you still move?"

"Yes, a little, I used healing magic, but I have reached my limits. Without my assistance, can you win?"

The pair of sisters, Yuri and Hikari rushed over to the side of Erica who was forcing herself to endure the pain.

"Of course it is not a problem, how can I ask someone injured to look after me!"

Godou looked over at Alice.

The princess whose expression had become completely serious, nodded and motioned for Yuri and the rest to leave. The Hime-Miko sisters picked up Erica in their arms, and slowly moved towards the stone steps. This Okusha inner shrine was going to become a battlefield, and departing from this place was the safest action.

The sisters and Erica, as well as Alice guarding the rear had left from the Okusha inner shrine.

"-- King Kusanagi, I see you have rode the wind to cross the gap between Youmingjie[109] and the human world."

Cult Leader Luo Hao finally turned her head.

That adorable expression like a beautiful flower, continued to maintain that smiling face.

Part 3

The loveliness of Cult Leader Luo Hao, far surpassed all the beauties Godou had ever encountered.

However, Godou did not let her steal his heart away.

"You not only possess combat skills and brute force, but also know magic, hohoho, I never expected Wakoku's[110] king to be such a promising young man. I have no idea how many [Kings] there are currently, but only I, Luo Hao, am blessed with both valor and wisdom. Perhaps one day you will be my successor."

"For me to become your successor? What a joke, who the heck would want to do that?"

Godou resolutely refused her suggestion.

"I am completely uninterested in martial arts that hurt people, and I won't learn any strange magic!"

"Say that as you may, but you do possess authority more powerful than any human on earth."

Luo Hao gazed at him as if watching an adorable little brother, while Godou glared straight at her.

"This is also a king's privilege. Take my rival for example, the wolf king of Eastern Europe is a devil king who ignores martial arts and eschews magic. In spite of that, he still holds power on the same level as me."

Was she referring to Marquis Voban? Godou recalled that abnormal old man. He definitely did not want to become like that, Godou wanted to lead a normal life like a human!

"Anyway! I don't approve of what you are trying to do. To go so far as to restore that monkey, give me a break! Because of this, Mariya and her sister have been through so much hardship, and you even injured my companion to that extent -- despite appearances, I am a pacifist at heart. However, I will fight you to avenge her."

"You will compete against me in combat? Hoho, King Kusanagi, do you think you can win?"

"It's not a matter of winning, but the principle of things that must be done. And right now I'm all fired up! I haven't been this angry for quite a long time!"

"Not bad, then you shall properly savor the authority and skills of I, Luo Cuilian!"

Luo Hao slightly parted her red lips, and began to recite verses lightly.

"Who shall report one's death / Self-pitying since return!"

Boom! The shockwave advanced towards Godou.

An attack fast as the wind with neither color nor form. Godou raised the magical power in his body and stood firmly on the ground. He felt like falling over, but he endured without much damage.

"You are surely talented at fighting, it is evident that you have been learning how to master your powerful abilities. Excellent. To us [Kings], the spells of the strongest magi or Daoists are completely ineffective. Even between [Kings] as peers, unless authorities are used to fill their bodies with mighty power, no lasting effect can be made. So --"

During such a perilous situation, why does she show such an expression?

The more he fought with her, the more Godou wanted to ask, how can she show such an innocent smile in the midst of battle? However, she constantly talked about the principles of fighting and ways of combat, and now her delicate and slender body was quietly approaching Godou --

"In times like this, a bold close quarter attack is the most effective!"

From this point onwards, Godou couldn't see anything or understand what happened because he couldn't read her moves.

In terms of close quarter combat ability, Godou and Cult Leader Luo Hao were ten thousand light-years apart.

Thus, Godou did not dare dodge recklessly.

His only goal was to endure the first strike without dying. In the instant he saw Luo Hao drawing near, his body began to move. Arching his back, he positioned his arms in front, guarding his face , chest and abdomen, at the same time moving his hips back.

Godou's only consideration was to prevent her from scoring a critical hit, which is why he entered this kind of unsightly posture.

--Perhaps she might use a middle kick.

Something that felt as hard as an iron chain, struck Godou on his defending arms.

There was a feeling like an intense electrical current, a shock running amok within his body.

He could no longer feel his arms except for a scorching hot sensation where they were struck. Anyway, his entire body hurt, from his head, to his fingertips, his hands and feet, chest, abdomen and back, all parts of his body was being attacked by sharp pain, and blood gushed out of his mouth, for all his internal organs suffered severe impact. There was a feeling that a mere single attack damaged all parts of the body. Wait a minute, Luo Hao had the strength to throw a high school student high into the air, but this time Godou did not get sent flying by the mysterious impact, and simply collapsed on the spot. Presumably, she somehow converted her monstrous strength into direct damage. Scary...

These types of thoughts ran through Godou's mind.

Even so, he survived, Campiones were truly terrifying existences.

His entire body felt pain as if crushed, the two arms could only feel a scorched sensation, and there was a real sense that the body had been damaged from the core. Godou was able to analyze all these sensations one by one, because he had activated the [Camel] incarnation.

Verethragna's fourth incarnation, could only be used after suffering a certain level of injuries. This ability massively raised his leg strength and combat ability, and also conferred extraordinary defense.

--Godou's eyes were finally able to capture Cult Leader Luo Hao's movements.

As guessed, she did use a kick just now, and her beautiful right leg was just returning to the ground.

This time, it was an upper attack aimed at Godou's face. Entering a kungfu stance for a vertical punch, it was a move frequently seen in Hong Kong action movies.

Of course, Luo Hao's motions were a thousand times more fluent.

Godou evaded Luo Hao's punch by falling to the ground, and then maintaining that lying down posture, bounced his lower body up and kicked at her slender body.

"Oh... Your movements have changed. There is no art here but the fighting spirit and will to push yourself towards victory, like a ferocious beast -- adapting oneself to the opponent's power and situation. You usurped your authority from the war god with the ever-changing forms, and are using this ability to its full extent!"

Evading the kick, Luo Hao praised as she glanced sideways.

Carefully examining Godou who was lying on the ground, she was not deliberately showing off nonchalance, but only to clarify his ability.

Compared to her domineering attacks, her caution was even more terrifying instead.

Feeling like he was one of those legendary participants in a Yokozuna sumo wrestling match, Godou slowly got up.

Come to think of it, when he had just become a Campione, Erica had investigated his physical characteristics. His greatest difference from a normal person was the hardness of his bones, which surpassed that of most metals. Other than that, there was also an extraordinary natural healing ability.

Because of that, he was exceptionally durable, and that was how Godou survived. Had a normal person been hit by the attack just now, all the bones in their body would have been crushed and the internal organs all ruptured.

Thanks to the [Camel], Godou was now able to understand much more clearly how powerful Luo Hao was.

Her martial arts completely surpassed his imagination.

When she released her punches and kicks, the presence of her attacks could not be felt at all. Even for the most renowned martial arts masters, when they performed moves of that level of power, an amateur would be able to sense the incoming momentum. However, Luo Hao was able to completely bypass her opponent's senses.

Furthermore, her moves were extremely rapid and aggressive, her limbs traced very short trajectories, and the movements were tiny.

But they carried absolute power. Famed boxers can release a powerful punch with just a ten-centimeter separation, but Luo Hao didn't even need that kind of distance to release the same attack.

So that was why Godou had been unable to evade her attacks.

Godou became increasingly impressed, thanks to the combat senses conferred by the [Camel], he was now able to barely keep up with her attacks. In the split second when Luo Hao's limbs began to move, his reflexes automatically reacted.

In the instant she unleashed a middle punch, his body stepped lightly to the side to evade.

When she stepped forward for a heavy punch, he coordinated with her motions and stepped forward to counterattack with his knee.

If Luo Hao chose to counter this incoming attack, he would then crouch down and attack her pivot foot. So far, Godou's enhanced senses allowed him to sustain an equal fight.

His arms still felt numb and scorching hot, and likely needed more time to recover.

Actually he was wondering if they were broken, but Campiones had extraordinary self-healing, and the [Camel] also boosted recovery... However, the arms could very well get broken again the instant they healed.

"This might take forever, then I shall demonstrate to you one of my ultimate techniques."

The flower-like beauty bloomed in splendor.

Like the sun peering out from between the clouds. Like silver moonlight illuminating the dark night. As she exuded beauty and loveliness reminiscent of such imagery. Godou began to think, why doesn't this person normally show this kind of appearance to others?

"The Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Phoenix. This set of palm techniques is the most prided of my martial arts, and one of the most sought secrets of the martial realm. Savor it well."

Now that it's mentioned, Godou had heard somewhere that her disciple was very skilled in palm strikes. Looks like it was inherited from his master.

The first act of the tragedy began.

Slicing through the air with a sound like a jab, her palm struck Godou on the lower jaw, and then his abdomen was hit by both palms, his shoulder near the collar bone was chopped by the edge of her palm, and his thigh was pierced by her long and slender fingers.

Suffering a series of blows one-sidedly, Godou was finally able to return with a kick after she performed another three moves.

Unfortunately, this kick missed its target.

"The Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Flying Phoenix is a set of ultimate techniques consisting of twelve moves: Fengchudengmen, Fengyanchuanlian, Fengzhuataoxin, Feifengzhuiluo, Danfengchaoyang, Jinfengliangchi, Qunfenglianhuan, Xiongfengqianjin, Fengyitianxiang, Fenglongyinyang, Fenghuangshuangfei, Dafengwutian. Every move adheres to the principles of the yin-yang duality of complementary opposites, thus making equal use of gentle and strong force."[111]

Luo Hao even provided explanations in a friendly manner.

Furthermore, in addition to using her palm strikes with the very exaggerated names, she casually inserted the shockwave attacks as well.

"As if looking up at snowy Mount Taibai / Delighted to find Mount Wugong's sky."

"Government officials all in silent shadows / The seven generals lie awake."

"Welfare of the country this morn / Years of middle revival."

Every time she sang a verse, Godou felt as if he was struck by a shockwave like an invisible wall, pushing him backwards repeatedly.

If he didn't have enhanced combat abilities, he definitely would not have survived the attacks just now. On the other hand, Luo Hao hummed to herself as she walked towards Godou. The vast gulf separating this beauty from his ability level was increasingly evident.

Struck by a few more shockwaves, Godou was blown back far away.

These were the steps that led up to the Toushouguu inner Okusha shrine.

Sent flying there, Godou rolled down like a log. A normal person would have been heavily injured. Rolling down the steps, Godou was able to stop himself near the middle section.

Standing up, Godou concentrated power in his knees. However, his legs were still weak and he couldn't stand properly.

From the top of the steps, Luo Hao casually looked down.

"Stand up, King Kusanagi, you are one of the devil kings, you cannot fall from an attack of that sort. Stand and continue our fight ."

Uttering willful words, Luo Hao's beautiful musical voice like a yueqin[112] sounded once again.

"I am only an old woodsman, whispering a sob / As I steal like a spring-shadow down the Winding River. / ...Since the palaces ashore are sealed by a thousand gates!"[113]

She was getting ready to release the shockwave that blew the [Boar] away! Godou swallowed hard.

The black divine beast was no longer, if he took the attack with his body, Godou had no confidence in his ability to survive. Damn it. For her to use such a high-powered attack on a person!

Godou smiled wryly as he cursed in his heart.

On further thought, he had done the same thing to other gods or Campiones.

In the vast majority of cases, the enemy was still lively after being struck. In that case, he himself should be able to resist this. In actual fact, he had already prepared a counter for the move.

--Luo Hao had two authorities.

Caught in a dilemma over which one to nullify, there was no longer any time for deliberation now.

Since she could use both at the same time, the close combat ability and the projectile were both powers that had to be sealed. But if this continued, he would be stuck in a battle where he was pressured without the ability to fight back.

"Fine willows, new rushes, for whom are you so green? ...I remember a cloud of flags that came from the South Garden / And ten thousand colors, heightening one another!"

Luo Hao's song became even more intense.

The magical wind born from words, blew shockwaves that attacked every direction, knocking everything over.

By this point, the storm could not be stopped by ordinary methods. Godou entered the [Warrior] and drew his sword of spell words.

"Cult Leader Luo Hao! Your song is the authority usurped from the Hindu goddess Gayatri! Five faces, ten arms -- the deity worshipped as the goddess of the sacred song with five faces and ten arms!"

The spheres of light appeared around Godou like stars.

On the other hand, the demonic cult leader's surroundings were being destroyed by the shockwaves accompanying the magical wind.

All of Toushouguu's inner Okusha shrine -- the precious tower housing Tokugawa Ieyasu's remains, the gate, the shrine, the surrounding cedar trees, all were being swept by the magical wind and shattered into innumerable pieces.

Watching this scene from the stone steps, Godou created the spell words of the [Sword].

Like stars in the night sky, his surroundings flashed with countless sources of light.

Spreading out around him, they protected him from the impact of the magical wind.

"The Vedas, sacred scripture of the ancient religion Brahmanism . Gayatri was originally one of the verses in the Vedas, taking form from a particular mantra. But as a deity, Gayatri is the wife of the creator Brahma, she is the river goddess, and also the goddess of language and writing. Following the lineage back to the mother earth deity, she should be identical to Saraswati, a very high ranking goddess!"

By this point, the shockwaves of Luo Hao had reached their maximum power.

With the Okusha inner shrine as the center, the surroundings were all destroyed as if swept by a typhoon. Everything was blown to a total mess by the violent wind.

Virtually anything with form had collapsed.

Other than Luo Hao at the eye of the storm, the only one unaffected was Godou protected by the [Sword], but as the area of destruction gradually expanded, not only the Okusha inner shrine but the rest of Nikkou Toushouguu, Futarasan Shrine and Rinnouji , as well as Nikkou Kaidou outside, could very well be blown away.

Just protecting himself was not enough.

He should sever the root of destruction, thus Godou pointed the [Sword] at Luo Hao.

Somehow his right arm felt quite hot. When taking the [Warrior]'s form to control the blade of spell words, believing in the rise of power, it was always this arm, is that why it became hot?

"Saraswati is the creator of Sanskrit and Devanagari script. The goddess ruling over music and the arts, she is also called Benzaiten in Japan. As Gayatri she could control the spirit of sounds, the goddess in charge of sacred songs of praise for the gods! This is the root of your authority!"

Accelerating the [Sword], severing the goddess Gayatri's authority which lay within Luo Hao's body.

A reaction, it was severed for sure.

The magical wind suddenly stopped, and the spreading destruction caused by the shockwaves halted.

Godou's right arm which had been as hot as fire was now completely cooled, like plunging his arm into the core of ice -- wait a minute, now was not the time to care about such things.

"The sword of spell words for severing a god, truly remarkable! "

Losing the authority of the song, Luo Hao continued to speak with that beautifully musical voice.

The antique wooden buildings, the dark lush cedar forest, and even the stones used for paving steps had been blown away. The surroundings of Toushouguu's inner Okusha shrine was now completely bare.

Slightly forward a bit at the entrance to the Okusha inner shrine , Luo Hao was standing motionless.

"King Kusanagi -- No, Kusanagi Godou, I have lived over two hundred years since becoming a devil king! In this period, no one has ever pushed me to such an extent like you! Hohoho, pitting my might in a competition against a fellow peer is truly a joy, now it is my turn to show my ultimate move!"

Right, she still had the authority of the Benevolent King Buddha Guardians, as well as her trained martial arts.

She was so unbelievably adorable, but at the same time, the slayer of the revered Benevolent Kings.

Haughtily looking down upon Kusanagi Godou, her upright standing posture was full of oppressive presence. Beneath her battle outfit, her graceful limbs were full of fighting spirit as she prepared to unleash her ultimate secret technique.

-- This is no joking matter, Godou twisted his lips hideously.

It was hard enough to put you at a disadvantage, I'm not going to let you reverse the situation!

Unwarily he smiled and focused his attention to the east. Cult Leader Luo Hao's violent acts were enough to release the flames of justice to punish the people's enemy, now was the time to unleash the greatest firepower, and light the signal beacons of war!

"For victory, hasten forth before me! O immortal sun, please grant radiance to the stallion. O stallion that moves godlike with wondrous grace, bring forth the halo of thy master!"

Verethragna's third incarnation, the [White Stallion] symbolizing the sun.

The real sun was already setting in the west. Nikkou's sky and scenery were dyed a shade of red by the sunset, but then a different sun appeared, releasing the rays of dawn from the east.

From the rays of dawn came a white spear of light.

As the sun of the planets exploded in the atmosphere, shining light was formed.

Hurtling towards the demonic cult leader who was more beautiful than the rising sun, the white burning flames continued to extend like white flashes of light.

The rays of dawn scattered all around, but just as the spear of flame was about to devour Luo Hao --

"Strength beyond numbers, strength beyond skill! A thousand tonnes in one leg, victory from a single kick!"

Luo Hao spoke spell words once again.

With flames appearing from her shoulders, this was the shiny golden brightness from the Benevolent King's form seen in the Netherworld.

Buddha Guardians! -- And this time, there were two of them.

That's right, the Benevolent Kings always came as an Om[114] pair, with the two united as one deity. The Buddha Guardians at the southern gates of Toudai-ji were also such a pair, with Narayana and Guhyapada on guard on the left and right of the entrance.

The authority [Divine Might of Vajrapani] conferred absolute might.

Even for Luo Hao, the muscles of her own body could not use such force fully, which is why those avatars are summoned, right? In order to use absolutely strongest might.

...If those muscular avatars were simply her preference, then it would be a bit disgusting. Godou speculated.

Thus the two grand golden Benevolent Kings stood boldly before the white flames.

--Hoon!! --Hah!!

The two voices made the ground shake and the air vibrate.

The two giants appearing on the left and right of Luo Hao, stepped forward.

Their naked upper torsos showed off their muscular golden physique, with their bulging constitution they were like two walls, shielding Luo Hao from the flames of the [White Stallion].

The golden muscles began to melt and slowly dissolved.

However, the pair of Benevolent Kings bore expressions of struggling endurance. Against stellar level heat and destruction from the universe, they protected their creator.

Soon after, the rays of dawn vanished and the attack of the white spear of flame stopped.

The two Buddha Guardians instantly fell down on their knees, their sacred muscular bodies melted halfway, and the rest of them immediately dissipated. The expressions on their faces told of resolution seen only on the faces of men who sacrificed themselves for great accomplishments.

Protected by the two giants, Luo Hao was completely unharmed! Not even a single burn!

"T-To think such a move was possible..."

Surprised and impressed, Godou groaned slightly.

Flexibly applying her wits and her authority, Luo Hao had blocked the attack with the greatest firepower in Godou's arsenal. In other words, Godou was now stuck in a deadly crisis.

"Hohoho, young man! You are becoming more and more surprising..."

Luo Hao gave a faint smile, there was a trace of blood beside her lips.

Her magical power -- qi, in oriental terms, was massively reduced. Losing those avatars had weakened her greatly, but she still had not suffered any critical damage. This was bad!

"Such resolve you have demonstrated, even I cannot help but admire. Now it is my turn to use my ultimate technique. I shall let you know that Luo Cuilian's fists, legs and palms, can destroy an army of millions!"

The sacred phoenix descended from the heavens.

The supple and delicate little hands shaped themselves into beautiful claws of the phoenix, and chopped at Godou from the air . If this happened at close range, his head would have been sliced open, with speed like an arrow shot from a powerful bow -- no, rather it should be speed rivaling a bullet.

Fighting the beauty whose martial arts were like a flying phoenix, Godou had no choice but to activate the [Raptor].

He knew this would never win. How should he fight? Stepping into the realm of super high speed, Godou felt his heart being eroded by despair.

When he fought Salvatore Doni in the past, that genius had seen through the [Raptor]'s speed.

Then of course, Cult Leader Luo Hao will surely --

Godou felt as if he had entered a labyrinth with no exit.

Part 4

This was Toushouguu's cedar forest.

Even higher than the tallest trees there, Lu Yinghua and Liliana Kranjcar were flying in the air. Overlooking the dark green clusters of cedar trees, the two were having an aerial battle.

The one who flew higher was Lu Yinghua of course, at around one meter above Liliana.

The one flying higher held the advantage, this was a principle of aerial battles.

Lu Yinghua deftly circled once, and made a forward rolling movement, using the momentum to perform a spinning kick in midair, his heel descending straight down! Liliana pulled back her saber, preparing to use Il Maestro but it was too late. Too fast!

Frantically raising her beloved sword in its glaive form, she used the shaft to block the kick.

As the two began to descend, Lu Yinghua attacked fiercely during the fall. His fingertips, seeming as sharp as awls, moved as if intending to take away Liliana's eyes; his hand was about to chop and sever her throat; his palm seemed as if it would shatter her shoulder, and he unleashed powerful palm strikes which could stop the beating of the heart.

--The Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Flying Phoenix, this was the strongest martial technique the youth learned from his master.

The silver-haired blue knight used the hilt and blade of Il Maestro to block every attack, all were defended by a dangerously slim margin.

Were she an instant too late, her fairy-like body would have been cruelly slashed and shattered.

However, swinging the magic sword for defense composed a dazzling magic melody, disrupting the martial artist's concentration.

Lu Yinghua took a deep breath to increase his qi for defense, thus forcing him to halt his attacks. Using this opening, Liliana released magic to fire an arrow of light --

This exchange of attacks all happened within the time frame of their fall from midair. The skill displayed in their aerial battle had already far surpassed most warriors in this world. To these two, not having a foothold to fight on was completely not an issue.

But though the battle raged on intensely, they had entered a state of stalemate.

Even though the martial artist held the advantage through his martial arts and physical ability, the knight was able to compensate through spells and her magic melody.

In a battle between capable combatants, it was common for fights to be either decided in an instant or dragged on in stalemate. This was the latter situation. And then at this time the spear of the sun came flying from the east only to be withstood by two golden giants -- causing Lu Yinghua and Liliana to watch the unbelievable scene instead.

"...I really have no wish to have a conflict when one of a level far surpassing myself is occurring so close to me."

"...So true, I was thinking we were fighting quite well, but it totally pales in comparison to this."

Losing interest, Lu Yinghua and Liliana simultaneously withdrew their weapons, his palms and Il Maestro.

"Personally, it's sufficient as long as I fought enough to pass as fulfilling my duty to Master. How about you, Nee-san?"

"Same here, my lord Kusanagi Godou is not a bloodthirsty animal."

Realizing what the other was suggesting, Liliana frowned.

"If you had no intention of fighting, I do not mind having a ceasefire... Is that really fine? Your goal is awakening the warlord of [Steel], right?"

"Not mine, it is just Master's goal."

Lu Yinghua shrugged his shoulders.

"That snake woman is almost dead, probably hopeless. There is no meaning in going all out. Afterwards, all I need to do is satisfy Master with an excuse, then I'm all set to return to Hong Kong. Yes , very likely that will be the real deadly challenge."

It seemed like being the Campione's direct disciple had its fair share of hardship. Anyway, if the opponent had no wish to fight, there was no need to recklessly continue the battle.

"...Oh my, it ended with ceasefire here?"

The blonde girl appeared from between the cedar trees. It was Erica, who probably found them through magic. She looked heavily injured, with her heavy footsteps and sluggish motions.

"Yes, originally it was a very intense battle, but in the end it became like this."

Though Liliana had not completely relaxed, she no longer tensed her shoulder.

If it was not a battle out of hate or revenge, then there were many opportunities to negotiate and interrupt a fight. Now they had simply entered this stage earlier than expected.

"If Kusanagi Godou is fighting, that means the Mariya sisters and the princess has returned? What are they doing now?"

"Waiting in the vicinity of this shrine is too dangerous, so I had them head to the bottom of the mountain."

Based on Erica's statement, they had been together along the way, which was more reassuring. Liliana nodded and began considering their next move.

"We should check out the duel between Kusanagi Godou and the cult leader, let's go up there and watch."

The battle between subordinates had ended, but victory between the [Kings] was not decided yet.

If they wanted to find a different place to negotiate, it would have to wait until the showdown was over. And then, depending on which side was the victor, the negotiation terms would be vastly different.

"So which king has the advantage?"

"Oh? You're not going to say your master will win for sure?"

Hearing Lu Yinghua's whisper, Erica asked, incredulous. Liliana was also intrigued. In situations like this, most people would hope for victor to be the one closer to them.

"If based purely on seniority or martial arts, Master will surely win."

The young martial artist showed a bitter expression.

"But had they been such predictable people, they would have died in their original battles against gods. I'm not silly enough to expect devil kings to act like ordinary mortals, oh?"

The [Raptor] form was the fastest of all incarnations provided by Verethragna's authority.

Only usable in response to high speed attacks, the body will awaken extraordinary speed and become light in weight. But there were two problems with it -- the side effects after use, and the inability to perform precise movements due to the excessive speed.

For example, if he aimed a punch at the opponent's face, it would end up hitting air fifty centimeters off target. Even Godou felt the speed was too fast which made it impossible to time attacks , so unless the enemy was motionless or had poor reactions, he could never score a hit.

But in terms of defense, super high speed was the treasure of guerrilla tactics.

As long as the opponent wasn't a monster like Cult Leader Luo Hao or Salvatore Doni --

"...Truly very fast. But King Kusanagi, if all you have is speed, I will catch you immediately."

After using super speed to escape from the powerful palm strike, Godou could hear someone call his name. He was unsure if it was due to the effects of his accelerated state, for the voice was not very clear and sounded like someone calling him from faraway .

"Those who capture the opponent with their eyes, commoners -- cannot possibly see through such speed. But there exist those whose hearing has reached extreme levels, and experts who have mastered their mind's eye, like me!"

Once again, Godou heard a faraway voice.

By the time he heard it, the slender fingers of a soft palm grazed his left shoulder.

Intense pain spread through his body. Perhaps the shoulder has been dislocated. For a simple graze to have such great power, it was true that Cult Leader Luo Hao had the speed to catch up to the [Raptor] after all.

That's right. Salvatore Doni also had awakened the technique of the mind's eye.

That optimistic fool, prided himself on the ability to slice water droplets in the rain. In other words, no matter how fast Godou went he was still able to see it, what an infuriating declaration.

Like a certain novel about a sword master, there was also a damnable character like that in the story.

Furthermore, Salvatore used the shortest sword strikes possible to intercept his enemy. With godly high speed sword techniques which could cut Godou no matter how fast he moved, combined with direction from the mind's eye, the [Raptor]'s super speed was defeated immediately.

That man could very well be a swordsman who could match Miyamoto Musashi or Yagyuu Juubei.

And of course, Cult Leader Luo Hao was the same.

From Godou's eyes, her movements seemed stiff and slow, like lagging when playing an online game on a low-end computer. That was how Luo Hao's palm strikes looked to him.

With the speed of the [Raptor], it should be a simple matter to evade. However, in the next split second, Luo Hao's palm was already right in front of Godou's face. In the end, it took all of Godou's efforts to dodge her attacks.

If this continued, Godou knew he would be cornered soon and decided to counterattack.

Thanks to the [Camel]'s recovery, his arms had regained feeling and he attempted a right straight punch. No good, it missed Luo Hao's beautiful face by half a meter.

"That kind of punch won't even touch my shadow! King Kusanagi, you are too inexperienced!"

Luo Hao shouted as she tightened the fingers on her right to form a spear hand[115], thrusting at Godou's throat.

As for that counterattack -- too dangerous now! Definitely had to evade first!

At the very last moment, Godou made a little jump and escaped from the danger of getting his throat torn open.

However, Luo Hao rushed near silently like a phantom, and began a flowing series of attacks.

"The sword unsheathed, grassland turns into forest! Sky earth wind clouds, the lion king seeks domination! Trodding tirelessly along the hero's endless path, approaching the supreme pinnacle of the martial way."

Singing like a ballad, Luo Hao used all sorts of offensive maneuvers.

Palm strikes aimed at the upper and middle approaches. Her supple palms were like iron hammers that could crush meat and bone together.

The spear hand thrusted at short distance vulnerabilities. The slender fingers were like spears bringing disaster.

Like the famed Green Dragon Blade[116]The delicate and pale knife hand chopped at Godou's head, neck and shoulders. Aggressive attacks came one after another.

Incoming elbow strikes were like a sharp and swift sword. Grappling moves grabbed Godou's arms and legs like a dragon's bite. All these attacks flowed endlessly, like a majestic river -- the likes of the gushing Chang Jiang[117] and Huang He.[118]

Godou was like a nimble boxer trying to evade the onslaught of a great river.

But of course he could not escape completely. Godou's dodging body was gradually caught by Luo Hao's palm strikes, and even his forehead almost got sliced, and his spine nearly shattered.

Though he blocked his vitals, in a very short instant, he was getting pummeled like sandbag.

--As expected, continued dodging was not going to work.

In his despair, Godou recognized one fact, if he didn't attack then there it would be truly hopeless!

When using the [Raptor], there was one move that had a fair chance of landing a hit, as long as the opponent wasn't Luo Hao. However, other than that, there were no other options to reverse the tide of battle. Then one could only take the plunge --

No, just as Luo Hao's knife hand grazed the flank of his abdomen, Godou dispelled all doubt.

That method cannot be called reversing the tides of battle, it was only self-abandonment. Raw speed was useless against Luo Hao, and he understood that point very well. That's right, raw speed --

In that very instant, inspiration came!

In order to switch to an offensive stance, Godou jumped faraway backwards.

"Hoo... Looks like you have made your decision, King Kusanagi . Your eyes show excellent determination."

Noticing his change, Luo Hao smiled gently.

Standing there as if waiting for Godou's attack, she looked completely off guard, but in actual fact, this kind of natural stance was used to handle any kind of attack.

She clearly aimed for a counterattack.

Knowing that, Godou raised the [Raptor]'s speed to its limits and began to charge.

Crashing his body in a straight line, this eliminated the need for precise aim, like a runaway train he hurtled towards his collision target.

Luo Hao also entered a stance.

Perhaps she was preparing to attack by clapping her hands together, and she extended both palms before her chest.

This posture hinted at what the girl intended as her next move. Before the impact struck, Godou's head will be smashed from both sides by Luo Hao's palms, whose monstrous strength will prevent him from advancing further. His skull will be crushed and his brain will surely be made into clam chowder -- something like that .

An ordinary enemy would be unable to evade a shoulder strike enhanced with the [Raptor]'s speed. But since the enemy here was Cult Leader Luo Hao, his move would likely be countered, and he will surely lose.

But all he could do now was gamble on this one move. Please, let it be successful --

Godou's challenge was releasing the [Raptor]'s speed.

Not accelerating but decelerating.

Even if a pitcher specialized in fastballs, he would be quickly defeated if all he did was throw fastballs to intimidate the batter. The key concept was variation, because mixing slow and fast pitches would make it difficult for their eyes to adjust. As an accomplished catcher, Godou could not possibly be ignorant of how to control fast and slow pitches.

This experiment was a success.

From the realm of god speed he returned to the world of normal speed.

He was now moving at the rate of a normal high school student, without any supernatural speed. Expecting highly accelerated motion, Luo Hao lost the target of her pincer attack.

Before Godou arrived, her hands had already clapped together.

"-- Let's go!"

In the instant the girl's hands came together like the palms of the thousand-handed Avalokitasvara.[119]

Godou activated the [Raptor]'s acceleration, and once again charged forth with godlike speed.

Suddenly extending his right fist, it was the same dagger stabbing motion used in those outdated heroic movies[120], that was exactly what Godou was trying to imitate.

This punch, along with the momentum of his body, struck Luo Hao squarely at the base of her sternum.

"...Oooh!"

It was the first time he ever heard the cult leader moan.

The orchid-like[121] beautiful body was bent into a v-shape and she sank to her knees. This was the moment when Kusanagi Godou struck the most fearsome Campione.

And then, in that instant a most unexpected phenomenon occurred.

Boom!

The wind was screaming mournfully. Between Godou's fist and Luo Hao's chest, the screaming winds accelerated. From the body of the girl named Luo Cuilian, a shockwave was released that felt as if it would blow away everything on earth.

It was as if Luo Hao's own body produced a shockwave of magical wind.

But Luo Hao also fell over slowly, what was going on?

"Ah! ...This time it's Master's loss."

This mocking declaration was heard a little afterwards.

At some point in time, that original feeling of icy coldness on his right arm had disappeared.

Epilogue

The monkey divine monarch who had been turned into a stone monkey, was still imprisoned in the stable.

His body above the knee had returned to flesh, though below the knee was still stone.

The walls of the stable reflected the sky on earth, and gradually it became night.

The snake deity Leviathan that had originally hovered in the air had crashed. Since the sacrifice required for his awakening ritual had disappeared, the monkey divine monarch's revival was halted mid-way.

-- However.

"Since it has progressed to this point, perhaps that particular method might work?"

Looking at the stone covering his legs, the divine monarch muttered to himself.

Though the legs could not move, everything else were freed, so it may very well work.

"If it doesn't work then I'd just go back to things as before, no harm in trying. The Immortal tours the North Sea in the morning and returns to Cangwu[122] at dusk -- hey!"

No explanation required. He was using his divine power to make his body float.

He rapidly formed mudra[123] hand gestures in the air.

In the next instant, the monkey who held the position of Keeper of the Horses was standing on a cloud, hovering in the air.

"Dragon-slaying treasured blade, open the way for me!"

He was giving order to Zanryuutou which was lying on the floor.

As he commanded the treasured blade infused with the miko's power of disaster purification, it became a curse lifting sword. Though only for an instant, the barrier of the [Keeper of the Horses] was broken.

Using that instant, the monkey divine monarch rode the cloud and charged out of the walls of the stable.

--Success! Breaking through the barrier and flying through the corridor on his cloud, he instantly leapt onto the surface of the ground.

Driving the flying cloud, the monkey divine monarch surveyed the ground from the air.

It was the slightly familiar scenery of Nikkou mountain.

He was now liberated, but his legs below the knee were still made of stone, so it cannot be called a full revival. At this time the divine monarch began to sniff in order to locate that miko.

-- Found her!

The cloud flew to the foot of Nikkou mountain, reaching the visiting path leading up to Toushouguu.

There were two miko and a woman with brilliant blonde hair, but his target was only the little miko.

"See, I found you! Hahaha, you cannot escape!"

"--Monkey Divine Monarch-sama!? Why have you come to the surface!?"

"Hmm? So this monkey is the warlord of [Steel]...!?"

The older miko and the girl with the shiny hair were greatly surprised.

"D-Divine Monarch-sama!?" The targeted little miko opened her cute little cherry mouth in surprise.

"Oh, this body would suit me perfectly. I'm sorry but I will be borrowing your body for a while. Come! The thunder rolls under the sky, free from insincerity. Great progress and success, advantage in faithfulness!"

Using divine power simultaneously with the mantra, the monkey divine monarch began to transform.

Unlimited transformation skills were synonymous with his name, though currently they had yet to be fully restored, he could still use a portion of them.

Turning himself into a tiny golden sphere, he slipped into the little miko's mouth. The invaded body now belonged to him, and the divine monarch instantly gained control of the body and the mind.

The miko's body was now the possession of the divine monarch. Hikari suddenly opened her eyes wide.

"Red eyes and golden pupils...!?"

"T-This is the fiery-eyes golden-gaze -- ! Does that mean Hikari's body has been... by Divine Monarch-sama -- !?"

As the women's gazes were drawn, it looked like the holy eyes have manifested.

Next it would be best to go find a mirror. Though he was just a monkey, he cared a lot about his looks.

Yes. I am a monkey, but not the monkey divine monarch. Now that I have possessed the miko of disaster purification, I can use her spirit powers, and the remaining binding spell can be neutralized by her spirit power --

"OK, next it's time to get busy. I shall bring disaster upon the earth, and have some real fun! Hahaha, goodbye, see you later!"

Using the miko's voice to warn everyone, he made a backflip in the air with her body.

Once again riding a cloud flying through the sky, he still had not decided on his destination. Might as well greet the god-slayers first. He had finally retrieved his power as a god.

"Ah! ...This time it's Master's loss."

The one speaking with mocking tones was the delicate-looking youth.

Could he be Luo Hao's direct disciple, the young master of some family... Lu Yinghua? Together with him, Erica and Liliana had come over. Seeing everyone safe and sound, Godou finally felt relieved.

His heart suddenly felt a kind of cramp-like pain. This was the side effect of using the [Raptor]. Very soon, his body will become immobilized.

Time was up. Godou clearly had no more strength for battle and no more time, but why was it his victory?

"Y-You can also say I've lost, look how wounded I am all over."

Enduring the pain, Godou questioned.

Why was the youth favoring the enemy rather than his own master? How unbelievable.

"Oh, looks like you didn't notice... Master has fainted."

Prompted by these words, Godou looked at the beauty once again.

Maintaining her kneeling posture, completely motionless.

"Kusanagi-san's last move, looks like it was very effective."

Lu Yinghua shrugged. The last move? What happened?

"Making use of the variation of speed, performing a feint with a slow move, and then suddenly striking hard at the Jiuweixue[124] pressure point, plus you used some kind of authority right? It was probably due to that strong attack, whatever, after all it's just temporary unconsciousness... Though there were no heavy injuries , she is definitely down for the count."

Godou was very surprised, for he could not recall what he had done.

"Even if she didn't faint, Master should admit her failure. With her incredible pride, though you are both Campiones, to be struck by an upstart kid in the Jiuweixue pressure point which is just as critical as the energy center and the Tanzhongxue, that's far too shameful."

"Y-You're exaggerating, actually I can't even budge. It hurts!"

The pain was increasing, and Godou's body began to stiffen. His endurance reaching its limits, Godou tried to gesture at the unoccupied girls with his eyes. I leave the rest to you girls, please!

"That's right... Godou did strike her in a critical spot, but him being heavily injured is also fact. According to the result, in the end it should be..."

Erica pondered, while Liliana spoke with a displeased expression:

"A draw? Yes, that description may be more apt..."

"Yes, that's settled then. It's almost time to wake her up -- Master! Please come to your senses, Master! Are you ok!?"

"Even though she only fainted lightly, would it not be better to do some healing?"

Lu Yinghua shrugged in response to Liliana's suggestion.

"True, but whenever someone tries to touch her while she is sleeping or unconscious, Master's body will automatically attack... Twisting people's necks off as she sleeps with extreme ease, it's best to be careful."

This statement made Godou shudder in fear.

In other words, if he were to let victory overcome his senses, and tried to use the opportunity to give the unconscious Cult Leader Luo Hao a finishing blow, he could very well have died.

Though obviously he never had such intentions, it once again highlighted their vast difference in level.

"Mmmmm... Mmmmmm..." The lovely girl who terrified Godou finally responded to her disciple's calls.

And then she suddenly opened her eyes. Raising her upper torso, she began to cough in an adorable manner.

"This... This place is? What on earth -- ?"

"Master, your disciple Lu Yinghua has been diligently observing the valorous battle between the two great warriors. Kusanagi Godou has exhausted all his strength and cannot move a single step while Master fainted. In other words, there is no victor here, and it's a draw, how's that --"

With a perfectly respectful tone, Lu Yinghua reported the outcome to his master.

Luo Hao was silent for a while, but very soon recalled what transpired.

She stared at her disciple, stared at Godou, and along the way stared at the two knights at the back as well, and then her pale and beautiful facial features went red, and she bowed her head.

"My young eagle, your description is very appropriate! Everyone, will you please be dismissed!"

Continuing to keep her head low, she spoke.

Immediately after this, everyone at the scene heard the cheerful voice of a young girl.

"Oh my, two Campiones, what happened to you two? How did you both get so beaten up? Hahaha, I see, you guys were fighting again oh, what vigorous and impulsive young blood!"

Though it was Mariya Hikari's voice, it felt like a completely different entity was speaking.

Looking into the sky, Godou was very surprised.

Hikari was riding a little golden cloud hovering in the night sky .

Looking down from the air, her eyes were very strange. The eyeballs were red as if bloodshot from smoke irritation, but the pupils were gold in color.

This was called fiery-eyes golden-gaze, which Godou only found out later.

The [Raptor]'s side effects made his heart hurt badly, and his body could not move. However, he felt very excited, as if meeting a longtime rival, it made his body overflow with fighting spirit.

Beside him, Luo Hao had recovered mobility and had forgotten the fatigue of battle.

--Mariya Hikari had become a god, a [Heretic God].

A mask appeared on the young little miko's face, a white one with a monkey's face with red around the eyes. Godou once saw it in Beijing opera photos.

This was the painted face used when playing the role of the [Handsome Monkey King].

Godou knew his name, but couldn't say it out due to pain.

"Finally awakened, Handsome Monkey King?"

Luo Hao raised her head and asked with determination in Godou's stead.

"Exactly, exactly, god-slayer who shares my homeland!"

The [Heretic God] used Hikari's voice to reply and then pointed at the heavens.

"I am not the monkey divine monarch. I am the sky, the existence equaling heaven --"

That solemn presence belonged to neither the cheerful and lively miko, nor the humorous monkey.

"I am the monkey king born from stone, with infinite divine powers, unlimited transformations, stealing elixirs from heavenly palaces, alcohol-loving, peach-stealing, playing with martial arts, acting with ferocity, exposing evil!"

In Hikari's hand appeared a steel staff.

"My surname is Sun, with given name Wukong. I crowned myself, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven!"

Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong.[125]

This was the name of the powerful god who wielded the Ruyi Jingu Bang.[126]

At the same time, in the surroundings of Nikkou mountain --

The people who had collapsed on the ground due to their life force absorbed by the snake deity Leviathan.

They started to transform. Whether male or female, old or young, with their different faces and all sorts of origins, their appearances changed and they became active again.

Not as humans, but in the form of monkeys.

Currently in the vicinity of Nikkou Toushouguu, a huge number of monkeys had appeared.

Furthermore, at the same time in Narita airport --

A woman from America walked by herself out of the arrivals area, and was searching for the station for the express train she was going to take. As she thought to herself, it had really been a long while since she last went travelling overseas.

The past few years had been very busy, fighting sorcerers, monsters and demons incessantly.

To her, this trip was a valuable opportunity to forget her previous failure.

Yes. That kind of guy should just be forgotten. That kind of man was not her type in the first place. She must have made a mistake somewhere.

She must choose her partner more carefully in the future. The next one must be more relentless, handsome, well-mannered, and stylish in order to be her partner. All sorts of people live in this world, to think that there existed women who would choose that kind of man as her lifelong partner...

'Annie, the green bird of fortune will not visit those who deceive themselves, oh?'

'In other words, sour grapes.'

Those dear old men would probably give comments like these if they were here, thought the American lady to herself.

Her name was Annie Charlton, also called John Pluto Smith, the devil king praised as a living legend in Los Angeles.

Afterword

Hello everyone it's been a while, I am Takedzuki Jou.

The 6th volume has successfully published, and it makes me really happy.

This volume and the next will be an important theme of the " Toei Manga Festival Cross Over."

The result is, many of the named but unintroduced characters will be making their appearances one by one.

The visitor from the devil's city Los Angeles, new characters from London, etc... It can be described as very lively.

And amongst the new members, there is one character with particularly distinguished characteristics, that I love very much even as the author.

Combining the many attributes of "Tsundere", "Chuunibyou"[127], "user of the Dainty Fist (the more shy she gets the more powerful)", the character which underwent amalgamation of the devil. Ara? This is just a typical tsundere? I'm not too confident about that myself.

So, from now on the stage is set to move from the lowlands to somewhere at a higher altitude.

The deep mountains of Emei[128], powerful enemies, scary hot springs, etc... All these will appear before Godou's group.

Ara, that last one doesn't seem too threatening... One may say that, but perhaps to our protagonist here, it is an even tougher challenge than his fated rival from a previous life.

If possible, everyone please look forward to it.

Furthermore, in such a famous battlefield as hotsprings, how dense should the steam be?

On this issue, not only mine but the will of the Super Dash Bunko editorial department also matters.

If everyone wishes for a complete release of restraints, please send these passionate wishes by mail or email to the editorial department, that would be most wonderful.

Takedzuki Jou, February 2010

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Sorcery**: within the context of the Campione series, " sorcery" refers to an evil type of magic.
2. ↑ **Enlil**: chief deity in Sumerian mythology.[1]
3. ↑ **Uras**: Sumerian goddess of the earth, grandmother of Gilgamesh.[2]
4. ↑ **Ninlil**: consort goddess of the Sumerian chief deity Enlil.[3]
5. ↑ **Lugal**: Sumerian term for king or ruler.
   Edinnu: Sumerian word meaning plain or steppe, from which "Eden" was derived.
6. ↑ **La-Tarak**: Sumerian deity variously identified as either the twin of Lulal or as Lulal himself. Lulal is the patron deity of ancient city Bad-tibira.[4]
7. ↑ **MUL**: the determiner glyph for stars and constellations in cuneiform.
8. ↑ **Dr. Watson**: the friend and assistant of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes.[5]
9. ↑ **Dick Grayson**: one of the characters in Batman comics who took on the role of Batman's sidekick Robin.[6]
10. ↑ **Yueqin**(月): nicknamed the "moon guitar," a stringed traditional Chinese instrument that resembles a lute with a round body.[7]
11. ↑ **Mount Lu**: a famous mountain located in southeastern China.[8]
12. ↑ **Han Chinese Clothing**: historical attire of the Han Chinese people, worn for thousands of years until the conquest of China by the Qing dynasty.[9]

13. ↑ **Style name**: a Chinese style name, also known as a courtesy name, was a given name generally used after the age of twenty as a sign of adulthood and respect. The use of style names have fallen out of tradition since the early twentieth century.[10]
14. ↑ **Wuxia**(武): literally "martial hero," the wuxia is a heroic ideal featured in Chinese martial arts novels. Bound by a code of honor, the wuxia seeks to uphold justice and protect the helpless and the poor through their martial arts skills.[11]
15. ↑ **Daoism**: the modern Romanization of the term Taoism, the philosophy and religion based on the "Way."[12]
    Daoist arts(方): called the Five Arts in modern times, refers to traditional Daoist practices including alchemy, medicine, Feng Shui, charms and talismans, exorcism, etc. Within the context of *Campione!*, Daoist arts can be thought of as the Chinese variant of magic.
16. ↑ **California Current**: ocean current flowing southwards from Alaska down to California. Technically, the California Current sent Asherah to the North Equatorial Current which then carried her westward across the Pacific to Asia.[13]
17. ↑ **Kuroshio Current**(黒): literally "Black Tide," an ocean current that flows from the east coast of Taiwan towards the northeast past Japan.[14]
18. ↑ **Bousou Peninsula**(房): a peninsula on the southeastern part of Japan's largest island, Honshu. It forms the eastern edge of Tokyo Bay.[15]
19. ↑ **Witenagemot**: ("meeting of wise men" in Old English) a political institution in Anglo-Saxon England.[16]

20. ↑ **Ramiel**: often confused with Azazel, Ramiel is one of the twenty leaders of the fallen angels mentioned in the Book of Enoch.[17]
21. ↑ **Saitenguu**(西): fictional shrine, name literally means " Western Heavenly Temple."
22. ↑ **Nikkou Toushouguu**: a Shinto shrine dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, located in the city of Nikkou in Tochigi Prefecture. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[18]
23. ↑ **Saitenguu**(西): fictional shrine, name literally means " Western Heavenly Temple."
24. ↑ **Hakama**: traditional Japanese divided trousers.[19]
25. ↑ **Washi**(和): a style of paper made in Japan, generally tougher than ordinary paper made from wood pulp.[20]
26. ↑ **Nikkou Toushouguu**: a Shinto shrine dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, located in the city of Nikkou in Tochigi Prefecture. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[21]
27. ↑ **Tokugawa Ieyasu**: the founder and first shogun of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which ended the Sengoku (Warring States) era. [22]
28. ↑ **Hikaru Genji**: the protagonist of the classic Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji*.[23]
29. ↑ **Murasaki Shikibu**(紫): Japanese novelist and poet best known for authoring *The Tale of Genji*.[24]
30. ↑ **Daoist arts**(方): called the Five Arts in modern times, refers to traditional Daoist practices including alchemy, medicine, Feng Shui, charms and talismans, exorcism, etc. Within the context of *Campione!*, Daoist arts can be thought of as the Chinese variant of magic.
31. ↑ **Qinggong**(軽): literally "technique of lightness", a Chinese martial arts skill that allows great agility and speed of

movement. When exaggerated in fiction, it produces the effect of superhuman speed and even flight.[25]

32. ↑ **Qi**(気): known variously as ki/chi/qi/chakra, an oriental concept of life energy. In *Campione!*, the concept is used in the context of Chinese martial arts, hence the romanization of "qi " will be used.
33. ↑ **Energy center**(丹): located below the navel (about three finger widths down and two finger widths deep), it is associated with cultivating life energy (qi) and vital essence.
34. ↑ **Qigong**: techniques involving the manipulation of qi or its flow.[26]
35. ↑ **Neigong**: literally "internal techniques", a synonym for qigong (manipulation of qi).
36. ↑ **Kinpira**: a method of stir fry and simmering.[27]
37. ↑ **Dimsum**: a style of Chinese cooking where food is prepared into small bite-sized or personal portions.[28]
38. ↑ **Yamato Nadeshiko**: the embodiment of the idealized traditional Japanese woman, wise, beautiful, capable, gentle and subservient.[29]
39. ↑ **Nikkou Kaidou**(日): a route built during the Edo period to connect Edo (Modern Tokyo) to Nikkou Toushouguu.[30]
40. ↑ **Nihonbashi**(日): literally "Japan Bridge."[31]
41. ↑ **Shukuba**(宿): post stations during the Edo period in Japan, used by travellers as rest stops.[32]
42. ↑ **Edo Five Routes**(五): five major routes built during the Edo period.[33]
43. ↑ **Matsuo Bashou**(松): the most famous poet from the Edo period.[34]

44. ↑ **Oku no Hosomichi**(奥): a major text of Japanese literature in the form of a travel diary, written by the poet Matsuo Bashou.[35]
45. ↑ **Sandou**: in Japanese architecture, the road leading to the entrance gates of a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple.[36]
46. ↑ **Torii**: traditional Japanese gate used as the entrance to Shinto shrines and also found within them. They symbolize a transition between realms.[37]
47. ↑ **Shamusho**: The building used as the administrative office of a shrine
48. ↑ **Gen**(艮): one of the eight trigrams from the Book of Changes. The trigram for *Gen* is .[38]
49. ↑ **Onmyoudou**(陰): literally "the way of the Yin and the Yang", mixing science and occult, a traditional Japanese philosophy based on Chinese concepts of the Five Elements and the Yin-Yang duality.[39]
50. ↑ **Shen**(申): one of the twelve earthly branches[40], it represents the direction of west-southwest and corresponds to the monkey in the Chinese zodiac.[41]
51. ↑ **Tendai**(天): a Japanese school of Mahayana Buddhism descending from the Chinese Tiantai school. [42]
52. ↑ **Enryaku-ji**(延): a Tendai monastery located on Mount Hiei [43], overlooking Kyoto.[44]
53. ↑ **Shogun**: hereditary military dictators of Japan who held actual power although the Emperor remained as the legitimate ruler in name.[45]
54. ↑ **Kodachi**(小): a small Japanese sword less than 60cm in length.[46]
55. ↑ **Zanryuutou**(斬): the name means "dragon-slaying blade."

56. ↑ **Shimenawa**: lengths of rice straw rope used for ritual purification by the Shinto religion.[47]
57. ↑ **Yomotsu Hirasaka**(黄): in Japanese mythology, the slope that leads to Yomi, the land of the dead. [48]
58. ↑ **Forbidden City**(紫): the Chinese imperial palace during the most recent Ming and Qing dynasties.[49]
59. ↑ **Sugoroku**: a Japanese board game.[50]
60. ↑ **Yamato Nadeshiko**: the embodiment of the idealized traditional Japanese woman, wise, beautiful, capable, gentle and subservient.[51]
61. ↑ **Han Chinese Clothing**: historical attire of the Han Chinese people, worn for thousands of years until the conquest of China by the Qing dynasty.[52]
62. ↑ **Style name**: a Chinese style name, also known as a courtesy name, was a given name generally used after the age of twenty as a sign of adulthood and respect. The use of style names have fallen out of tradition since the early twentieth century.[53]
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64. ↑ **Wakoku**(倭): the ancient term for the islands of Japan before it was recognized as a country.
65. ↑ **Zanryuutou**(斬): the name means "dragon-slaying blade."
66. ↑ *To the Moon Goddess*(嫦), by the Chinese poet Li Shangyin() from the Tang dynasty.
67. ↑ *Questioning the Moon, Wine in Hand*(把), by the Chinese Poet Li Bai() from the Tang dynasty.

68. ↑ **Qinggong**(軽): literally "technique of lightness", a Chinese martial arts skill that allows great agility and speed of movement. When exaggerated in fiction, it produces the effect of superhuman speed and even flight.[54]
69. ↑ **Shimenawa**: lengths of rice straw rope used for ritual purification by the Shinto religion.[55]
70. ↑ **Athirat**: Ugaritic goddess considered identical to Asherah.[56]
71. ↑ **Daoist arts**(方): called the Five Arts in modern times, refers to traditional Daoist practices including alchemy, medicine, Feng Shui, charms and talismans, exorcism, etc. Within the context of *Campione!*, Daoist arts can be thought of as the Chinese variant of magic.
72. ↑ **Hito-maru**(人): a Japanese poet, worshipped as a god of poetry.[57]
73. ↑ **Small knowledge...pitiful**: a quote from the Daoist philosophical classic *Zhuangzi*.[58]
74. ↑ **Vajrapani**: the protector and guide of Buddha, identified with Indra in India and also fused with Hellenistic influences and adopted elements of Heracles. Henceforth, he was depicted as a muscular athlete wielding a short club. In the far east, he became the inspiration for the Benevolent Kings, guardians of Buddha often made into stone statues to guard Buddhist temples.[59]
75. ↑ **Om**(ॐ): sacred to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, also written as "Aum" and transliterated as in Chinese and Japanese(pronounced "A-un"), representing the beginning and end of all things. In Shinto and Buddhist architecture, the term is used to describe paired statues.[60]

76. ↑ **Benevolent Kings**(仁): called "Niou" in Japanese, a pair of muscular and wrathful guardian deities of Buddha and manifestations of Vajrapani. They stand on guard at the entrance of Buddhist temples in the form of frightening statues.[61]
77. ↑ **Yokozuna**: the highest rank in Japanese sumo wrestling.[62]
78. ↑ **Immortals**(仙): in Chinese Daoist tradition, sages who achieve immortality through enlightenment.[63]
79. ↑ **Mandarin gown**(旗): also known as the cheongsam or qipao, a stylish one-piece body-hugging Chinese dress.[64]
80. ↑ *Fighting South of the Ramparts*(戰), by the Chinese Poet Li Bai() from the Tang dynasty.
81. ↑ **Grand Supreme Elderly Lord**(太): the Grand Pure One who is believed to have manifested as Laozi, the author of the *Daodejing*("Classic of the Way") that laid the foundations of Daoism.[65]
82. ↑ **Toudai-ji**(東): literally the "Great Eastern Temple," a Buddhist temple at Nara, Japan.[66]
83. ↑ **Open-mouthed**(阿): each pair of (Om/A-un) Buddhist statues consists of the a-type with their mouths open and the un-type with their mouths closed.[67]
84. ↑ **Seiza**(正): traditional formal Japanese sitting posture.[68]
85. ↑ **Lotus position**: cross-legged sitting posture with both feet placed on opposite thighs.[69]
86. ↑ **Juunihitoe**(十): literally "twelve-layer robe", an extremely elegant and highly complex kimono that was worn only by court-ladies in Japan.[70]

87. ↑ **Tang**(唐): China was ruled by the Tang dynasty from the 7th to the 10th century CE.[71] Referring to China in this archaic manner is perhaps a hint of the original time period of the princess.
88. ↑ **Magatama**(勾): curved comma-shaped beads from prehistoric Japan made from earthen materials, stone, and later exclusively jade. Originally used for decoration, they eventually functioned as religious and ceremonial objects. One of the Three Treasures of Japan is a magatama.[72]
89. ↑ *On Another's Sorrow* by English poet William Blake.[73]
90. ↑ **Qinggong**(軽): literally "technique of lightness", a Chinese martial arts skill that allows great agility and speed of movement.[74] Within the context of *Campione!*, qinggong is essentially the Chinese name for European [Leap] magic.
91. ↑ **Tanzhishentong**(彈): a fictional martial arts technique that trained the fingers to great strength and precision, allowing a single flick to fire off innocuously light objects as deadly projectiles, break or disarm the weapons of opponents, or even attack at range with just the wind from the finger's motion. Widely known due to the immensely popular martial arts novels of Jin Yong.[75]
92. ↑ **Righteous Harmony Society**(義): a Chinese uprising at the turn of the twentieth century that broke out against foreign influences due to the weakness of the Qing state.[76]
93. ↑ **Onmyoudou**(陰): literally "the way of the Yin and the Yang", mixing science and occult, a traditional Japanese philosophy based on Chinese concepts of the Five Elements and the Yin-Yang duality.[77]

94. ↑ **Word of Abandonment**: quoted by Jesus from Psalm 22, it is the only saying that appears in more than one gospel (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).
95. ↑ 2 Samuel 1:27
96. ↑ Psalm 22:19-21
97. ↑ 2 Samuel 1:22
98. ↑ Psalm 22:22
99. ↑ **Tanzhongxue**(膻): located at the midpoint between the two nipples. One of many pressure points identified in Chinese medicine based on a concept of circulating life energy (qi).
100. ↑ **Energy center**(丹): one of several pressure points considered a centre of qi life energy. The upper energy center located on the forehead between the brows is associated with the energy of consciousness. The middle energy center at heart level is associated with respiration and storing life energy. The lower energy center (also known as simply " dantian") located below the navel is associated with cultivating qi and vital essence.[78]
101. ↑ **Qigong**: techniques involving the manipulation of qi life energy or its flow. In the *Campione!* setting, qi is the same thing as what the Europeans call magical power, so a Chinese martial arts master is essentially a skillful manipulator of the body's flow of magical power.
102. ↑ **Neigong**: literally "internal techniques", a synonym for qigong (manipulation of qi life energy). In the setting of *Campione!*, qi is equivalent to magical energy.
103. ↑ **Lu Yinghua**(陸): the "Ying"() character in the name has the meaning of eagle.

104. ↑ **Il Maestro**: meaning "The Master," the Italian word maestro is used for master musicians, often as a title for composers, performers, music directors, conductors and music teachers.[79]
105. ↑ These are the names of the eight trigrams from the *Book of Changes*.[80]
106. ↑ **Benevolent Kings**(仁): pronounced "Niou" in Japanese, a pair of muscular and wrathful guardian deities of Buddha and manifestations of Vajrapani. They stand on guard at the entrance of Buddhist temples in the form of frightening statues.[81]
107. ↑ **Gayatri**: Hindu goddess of knowledge and education, often identified as Saraswati.[82]
108. ↑ **Mandarin gown**(旗): also known as the cheongsam or qipao, a stylish one-piece body-hugging Chinese dress.[83]
109. ↑ **Youmingjie**(幽): the Chinese term for the Netherworld which Luo Hao uses.
110. ↑ **Wakoku**(倭): the ancient term for the islands of Japan before it was recognized as a country.
111. ↑ **The Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Phoenix**(飛): Luo Hao's phoenix-themed martial arts. Move names translated:
     鳳(Fengchudengmen): Visit of the Young Phoenix.
     鳳(Fengyanchuanlian): Eye of the Phoenix Pierces the Veil.
     鳳(Fengzhuataoxin): Claws of the Phoenix Steal the Heart.
     飛(Feifengzhuiluo): Crash of the Flying Phoenix.
     丹鳳(Danfengchaoyang): Red Phoenix Basks in the Sun.
     金鳳(Jinfengliangchi): Golden Phoenix Spreads its Wings.
     群鳳(Qunfenglianhuan): Combo of the Phoenix Flock.
     雄鳳(Xiongfengqianjin): Heroic Phoenix Exerts a Thousand

Pounds.
鳳(Fengyitianxiang): Phoenix Wings Bring Celestial Signs.
鳳(Fenglongyinyang): Phoenix, Dragon, Yin, Yang.
鳳飛(Fenghuangshuangfei): The Soaring Pair of Male and Female Phoenixes
大鳳(Dafengwutian): Great Phoenix Blots the Sky

112. ↑ **Yueqin**(月): nicknamed the "moon guitar," a stringed traditional Chinese instrument that resembles a lute with a round body.[84]
113. ↑ *Sorrowful Song by the River*(哀) by Chinese poet Du Fu() from the Tang dynasty.
114. ↑ **Om**(ॐ): sacred to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, also written "Aum" and transliterated as in Chinese and Japanese (pronounced "A-un"), representing the beginning and end of all things. In Shinto and Buddhist architecture, the term is used to describe paired statues.[85]
115. ↑ **Spear hand**: a barehanded attack delivered like a punch except with an open hand, so the fingers stab into the target.[86]
116. ↑ **Green Dragon Blade**(青): the legendary weapon wielded by Guan Yu() in the classic Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The full name is Green Dragon Crescent Blade(青).[87]
117. ↑ **Chang Jiang**(長): the longest river in China, also known as the Yangtze River.[88]
118. ↑ **Huang He**(黃): the second longest river in China, also known as the Yellow River.[89]
119. ↑ **Avalokitasvara**: called Guanyin(觀) in Chinese and commonly known in English as the Goddess of Mercy, a

bodhisattva venerated by East Asian Buddhists and associated with compassion.[90]

120. ↑ **Ninkyou**(任): the exact term that Godou used, was a genre of movies involving themes of heroism and chivalry, particularly in yakuza settings, best exemplified by the performances of actors such as Tsuruta Kouji, Sugawara Bunta, and Takakura Ken.
121. ↑ **Cymbidium kanran**(寒): to be precise, the exact description is the Cymbidium kanran, a species of orchid.[91]
122. ↑ **Cangwu**(蒼): a county in the Chinese province of Guangxi.[92]
123. ↑ **Mudra**: religious hand gestures used in Buddhism.[93]
124. ↑ **Jiuweixue**(鳩): a pressure point located on the central line of the body just above the abdomen.
125. ↑ **Sun Wukong**(孫): the protagonist of the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. Pronounced "Son Gokuu" in Japanese, it is the namesake which the main character of Dragon Ball references.[94]
126. ↑ **Ruyi Jingu Bang**(如): the name of the magical weapon wielded by Sun Wukong, the protagonist of the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*.[95]
127. ↑ **Chuunibyou**(中): a term used to describe characters with particularly strong delusions.
128. ↑ **Mount Emei**(峨): one of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China.[96]